Art *beyond* Borders

CEU PRESS

Edited by
Jérôme Bazin
Pascal Dubourg Glatigny
and Piotr Piotrowski

Artistic Exchange in Communist Europe [1945–1989]

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Art *beyond* Borders

Leipzig Studies on the History and Culture of East-Central Europe

Volume III

Series Editors:
Christian Lübke and Stefan Troebst

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Artistic Exchange in Communist Europe [1945–1989]

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CEU PRESS
Central European University Press
Budapest – New York

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Published in 2016 by
Central European University Press
An imprint of the
Central European University Limited Liability Company
Nádor utca 11, H-1051 Budapest, Hungary
Tel: +36-1-327-3138 or 327-3000
Fax: +36-1-327-3183
E-mail: ceupress@press.ceu.edu
Website: www.ceupress.com

224 West 57th Street, New York, NY 10019, USA
Tel: +1-212-547-6932
Fax: +1-646-557-2416
E-mail: meszarosa@press.ceu.edu

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ISBN 978-963-386-083-0 Cloth

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Art beyond borders (Central European University Press)
Art beyond borders : artistic exchange in communist Europe (1945-1989) / Edited by Jérôme Bazin, Pascal Dubourg Glatigny, and Piotr Piotrowski.
pages cm
ISBN 978-9633860830 (hardbound)
1. Art and society--Communist countries. 2. Art--Foreign influences--Communist countries--20th century. 3. Art, European--20th century. 4. Cultural relations--History--20th century. I. Bazin, Jérôme, 1982- editor. II. Dubourg Glatigny, Pascal, 1969, editor. III. Piotrowski, Piotr, 1952-2015, editor. IV. Title.

N72.S6A723 2015
701'.03--dc23

2015004864

Printed in Hungary by Prime Rate Kft., Budapest

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Per correr miglior acque alza le vele
omai la navicella del mio ingegno,
che lascia dietro a sé mar sì crudele
Dante, *Purgatorio*, I, 1–3

Making Critical Art History in a Time of Academic Conformism

Piotr Piotrowski (1952–2015)

With the present collection of essays a long research partnership comes to an end, an itinerary made of generosity and intellectual challenges that led us, together with Piotr Piotrowski and the many scholars who took part to it, from Paris to Warsaw via Berlin and Poznan. This was a straight road made of many enticing detours.

Piotr was not only the scholar who initiated the study of Eastern European art after 1945 in a transnational perspective and who played a significant role in the internationalization of Polish art history. He ignored intellectual lazyness and castigated the blasé attitude so in vogue in the academic milieu. His presence always stimulated us to probe any historical assertion and to re-evaluate new historical trends.

We owe a huge debt to Piotr for questioning the place of Eastern Europe culture and heritage within the European project, which is today more than ever target of violent political assaults. We share with him the opinion that any feeling of cultural superiority is an obstacle for historical writing.

He fought for his convictions, never compromising his principles. He was not fooled by awards and institutional recognition. During his brief but

intense period as head of the National Museum in Warsaw, he never surrended either to the forces of conservative nationalism or to the liberal thinking. The museum for him should be neither a shrine for the masterpieces of the nation nor a money making machine. His project of critical museum was intended to share a piece of truth with the public and unveil the professed bourgeois mystery of art collections.

The project of a critical museum lives on and remains a challenge for the connections between museums and society. More about it can be read in the recent book Piotr edited together with his longstanding colleague Kasia Murawska-Muthesius, *From Museum Critique to the Critical Museum* (Ashgate, 2015).

With him, we are convinced that it is necessary to think over and over again about the possibilities of a critical art history. Piotr was an inspiring free man. No network subjugation, no convenience of thought, no ready made categories, no free ride.

I

Introduction: Geography of Internationalism

Jérôme Bazin, Pascal Dubourg Glatigny, and Piotr Piotrowski

In 2007, the National Museum in Warsaw exhibited the part of its collection from the years 1945–55.[1] Next to creations by Tadeusz Kantor à la Picasso or abstract paintings by Jerzy Nowosielski, the exhibition showed foreign paintings that the museum had bought at the time, notably Italian and French socialist realism, but interestingly no Soviet art. A painting by Renato Guttuso from Rome and one by Andrzej Wróblewski from Kraków were displayed side by side. Also on display were a still life by André Fougeron, which the National Museum purchased after its exhibition in Warsaw in 1952, and another still life by Zygmunt Radnicki. The exhibition revealed that socialist realism from Western countries, such as Italy and France, may have been more influential than socialist realism from the USSR.[2] The question of defining Europe emerged as a consequence—it was no longer a question concerning the geography of the single countries within Europe, but

1 Katarzyna Nowakowska-Sito, *Galeria sztuki XX wieku. Odsłony Kolekcji 1945–1955* (Warsaw: Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie, 2007).

2 Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius, "How the West Corroborated Socialist Realism in the East: Fougeron, Taslitzky and Picasso in Warsaw," *Biuletyn Historii Sztuki* 2:65 (2003): 303–29.

the changing shape of the continent. More generally, it suggested a complex circulation of objects, persons and ideas, as well as transactions between East and West through the Iron Curtain. One issue is how we describe and refer to the frontier usually called the Iron Curtain: it could be successively porous or, on the contrary, impassable. In any case, the censorship that the actors endured and/or practiced in the socialist dictatorships did not mean that they were isolated inside their country. We have to understand the reality of the different frontiers created either by national boundaries or by the Iron Curtain. Like all frontiers, they were both an obstacle—for those stopped by them—and a resource—for those who could cross them, be it physically or mentally.

A visit to the exhibition in Warsaw was the starting point for the project that resulted in this collective volume. Most of the scholars are looking at art under socialism from a national perspective. But they constantly find clues about exchanges with other countries—exchanges with other people's democracies but also relationships with the Western democracies (with their official environments and the sympathizers of the communist cause). Very often, scholars intuitively feel that the problems they are tackling should be placed in a broader context so as to see the fuller picture. That is why this volume will not be yet another country-by-country presentation; instead, it will attempt to present a transnational history of arts. In 1995, in a provocative speech about art in the GDR, Martin Warnke wondered whether artists from a socialist republic had a broader experience of the world than their Western counterparts.[3] Whereas West German artists looked only to London and New York (the international scene can be very narrow), East German artists traveled and worked in Poland, Bulgaria, Moscow, Soviet Central Asia, Cuba, India, Italy, etc.

Questions about exchanges and spaces are also recurrent. Indeed, the part of Europe known as Central or Eastern Europe appears to be a privileged terrain of the geography of art and related reflections on frontiers, circulation and scales. This part of Europe proves to be an interesting observation point to investigate transfers, mimicries, impositions, transplants and rejections,

3 Martin Warnke, "Gibt es den DDR-Künstler?" in *Auf der Suche nach dem verlorenen Staat. Die Kunst der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR*, ed. M. Flake (Berlin, Ars Nicolai, 1994), 40–47.

since the pioneering works of Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann.[4] These works teach us how to understand and historicize the operation that consists in associating a place and an artistic production (for instance, "Eastern European art," "Hungarian painting," "the Leipzig School"). They remind us that the identification and the labeling of works of art (as of persons) are constantly reshaped and depend on situational factors.

The geography of arts suggested different models, mainly based on the notion of influence. It dealt mainly with the question: where do the patterns appear and where are they reemployed? This option can only be regarded as inadequate, but it has seldom been criticized.[5] Behind the common notion of influence, the many interspaces that make any piece of art a unique item of knowledge simply disappear.[6] The panorama of art exchanges we map out in this volume is obviously far from exhaustive, but we have taken our cue from the realities of the various terrains taken into consideration and we do not aim to predispose any kind of archetypal map suggesting a crystalline explanation.

The very simple category of "Europe" needs to be called into question. As a matter of fact, the Iron Curtain constituted a convenient bipartition of the continent. The stability of the national borders after the Second World War helped to consolidate this static vision. However, in the postwar period, the destinies of some peripheral countries, such as Finland, Austria and Greece blurred a division that many would have taken for granted. The evolving of some socialist countries—not only Yugoslavia, Albania, and Romania—toward Moscow provides a more complex and changing picture. The notion of the "Soviet Bloc" seems less relevant today.[7] New alliances, some of them with China, Latin America or the Arab world, built unexpected bridges. The ideological war shifted from Europe to the Third World, to cultural contexts where "modern states" still had to be created, especially in Asia and Africa. Culture and the arts evolved along with economic interests. The bourgeois

4 Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, *Toward a Geography of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004). It is worth mentioning another pioneering work on another geographical entity, the one by Dario Gamboni on Switzerland: Dario Gamboni, *La Géographie artistique* (Disentis: Desertina, 1987).

5 Piotr Piotrowski, "On the Spatial Turn or Horizontal Art History," *Umeni/Art* 5 (2008): 378–83. Jean-Marc Besse, "Approches spatiales dans l'histoire des sciences et des arts," *Espace géographique* 3 (2010): 211–24.

6 Françoise Bardon, *Petit Traité de picturologie* (Paris: EC Editions, 2000).

7 Justine Faure and Sandrine Kott, eds., *Le Bloc de l'Est en question* (Paris: Vingtième siècle, 2011).

democracies exported a postcolonial paternalism, whereas the communist countries endeavored to incorporate the independence struggles into a formal internationalist ideology. Indeed, Europe was no longer alone (if it ever was), and the division into two blocs appears today to be a valid but insufficient explanation of the global situation. Hence, the political and cultural geography of the continent was much more widely extended than the physical geography would suggest. How does one draw a map of the artistic exchanges when the realities are shifting and the borders constantly expanding?

Highlighting New Source Fields

The gaps in our factual knowledge about art under socialism are gradually being filled in, albeit unequally. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, several international exhibitions in Bonn, Berlin, Vienna and other places, not to mention national exhibitions, presented initial outputs.[8] A further step was the comparison of artistic creations from each country. Scholars may select one point of comparison: types of art (geometrical abstraction,[9] mail art,[10] performance,[11] conceptual art[12] and acoustic experiments[13]), groups of artists (Fluxus[14]) or notions (the notion of gender[15] and the notion of reality[16]). It is worth mentioning some comparative academic art historical studies as well.[17]

8 Ryszard Stanislawski, ed., *Europa, Europa. Das Jahrhundert der Avantgarde in Mittel- und Osteuropa* (Bonn: Stiftung Kunst und Kultur des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen, 1994). Matthias Flügge, ed., *Der Riss im Raum. Positionen der Kunst seit 1945 in Deutschland, Polen, der Slowakei und Tschechien* (Berlin: Guardini Stiftung, 1995). Lóránd Hegyi, ed., *Aspekte/Positionen. 50 Jahre Kunst aus Mitteleuropa, 1949–1999* (Vienna: Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig, 1999).

9 Ranier Fuchs and Lóránd Hegyi, *Reduktivismus. Abstraktion in Polen, der Tschechoslowakei, Ungarn, 1950–1980* (Vienna: Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig, 1992).

10 Kornelia von Berswordt-Wallrabe, Katrin Mrotzek, and Kornelia Röder, *Mail Art: Eastern Europe in International Network* (Schwerin and Budapest, 1996/1998).

11 Zdenka Badovinac, ed., *Body and the East: From the 1960s to the Present* (Cambridge, MA, and London: MIT Press, 1998).

12 "Conceptual Art Central Europe," *e-flux Journal* 40 (2012) and 41 (2013).

13 David Crowley, ed., *Sounding the Body Electric: Experiments in Art and Music in Eastern Europe, 1957–1984* (Lodz: Muzeum Stuki, 2012).

14 Petra Stegmann, ed., *Fluxus East. Fluxus-Netzwerke in Mittelosteuropa/Fluxus Networks in Central Eastern Europe*, exh. cat. (Berlin: Künstlerhaus Bethanien, 2007).

15 Bojana Pejic, ed., *Gender Check* (Vienna: Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig, 2009).

16 Project at the German Centre of Art History in Paris: *To Each His Own Reality: The Notion of Real in Art in France, West Germany, East Germany and Poland from the 1960s to the End of the 1980s*.

17 Maria Oriškova, *Zweistimmige Kunstgeschichte* (Vienna: Praesens Verlag, 2008); Piotr Piotrowski, *In the Shadow of Yalta: Art and the Avant-garde in Eastern Europe, 1945–1989* (London: Reaktion, 2009); Amy Bryzel, *Performing the East* (London: J. B. Tauris, 2013); Klara Kemp-Welch, *Antipolitics in Central Euro-*

Debates about these exhibitions and academic works give rise to critical approaches and methodological reflections on the geography of art. The main pointed problems are the creation of an "East" and a "West" and, consequently, the homogenization of each entity on the one hand, and the asymmetrical consideration of the Western and the Eastern part of Europe on the other. Consequently, academic discourse risks the repetition of the historical imbalance that has existed since early modern times.[18] Furthermore, art from the Western world may be considered, explicitly or implicitly, as a model. The main issue is clearly to find out how Eastern Europe appropriated what was created in the West. What was done in Eastern Europe is supposed to provide new answers to already existing questions, but not to formulate new questions. The result was an advantage for the creations of artists who were known in the West to the detriment of those who did not cross over from the Iron Curtain. The problem of appropriation reveals misleading similarities and corroborates Western eurocentrism. This is important in the case of avant-garde art, but even more so in the case of socialist realism. The issues around these images are so different from the Western canonical creations that they become invisible if they are judged in the light of art historical narratives.

Debates about methodology are linked with the problems concerning sources. Following the first academic works that were based on personal and sometimes vague memories, more recent studies have focused on the availability of sources and their critics; this volume gives many examples of new sources and illustrates the problems they may address.

The great diversity of sources, which art historians are most familiar with and which are the most easily accessible, is presented here: exhibition catalogs, gallery publications, published or unpublished writings of artists and art critics. Some of the writings and manifests written by avant-garde artists have already been translated into Western European languages and have led to many discussions.[19] To understand these sources, the contextualization of

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*pean Art (*London: J. B. Tauris, 2014); Jérôme Bazin, *Realisme et égalité. Une histoire sociale de l'art en RDA 1949–1989* (Dijon: Presses du reel, 2015).

18 Among others: Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).

19 Stanislawski, *Europa, Europa*. Laura Hoptman and Tomáš Pospiszyl, eds., *Primary Documents: A Sourcebook for Eastern and Central European Art since the 1950s* (New York: MIT Press, 2002). It is worth mentioning that Sven Spieker is currently working on the anthology on conceptual art in Eastern Europe.

the position of the author in the artistic field and an understanding of the function of these texts are required. One must therefore question the purpose of art criticism in the socialist world. What is the role of an art critic in a socialist regime? What is the function of a manifesto? How far do exhibition publications institutionalize art practices?

Many other interesting sources are also available for this period: party files, files of any administration in charge of art production and conservation, files of state securities and files of artists' unions, etc. These archives provide evidence of the control and repression that surrounded artistic activities; they also give a voice to the different actors involved and highlight unexpected and sometimes forgotten dimensions of the problem. Reports we can read were *espaces de parole*, where artists, party members, members of mass organizations or audiences could express, through stereotypical formal language, their point of view (including in the reports of state security apparatuses). Unfortunately, accessibility varies from one postcommunist country to the next—we know that the ways the different sources are presented and their accessibility today are symptomatic of the way in which the communist past is regarded in current liberal systems.[20]

As in the case of sources, works of art are sometimes difficult to access. The current trend is to return to the original works of art—a trend that we sincerely support with this volume. The works in question were surrounded by harsh political and ideological readings. Through attentive and detailed formal analysis, it is now possible to analyze their particular discourse and to point to the possible difference between what was said about them and what they actually portrayed; in other words, to highlight the discrepancy between the production and the reception of art.

Interviews with witnesses cannot be excluded, provided that scholars analyze the narratives and their reconstruction critically, since memories are inevitably altered by political and personal concerns. The fact that memories are shaped and reshaped is an issue that the many studies in oral history prove, but that art history still largely ignores. For instance, an artist who now works in certain foreign cities may have stronger memories of previous contact with these cities and no or fewer recollections of contact with other cities that may

20 Sonia Combe, ed., *Archives et histoire dans les sociétés postcommunistes* (Paris: La Découverte, 2009).

have played a greater role at the time of socialism. The actual geography of art can replace and erase the formerly experienced geography.

A central issue for our project regarding sources needs emphasis: that is the question of language. A wide range of European languages are relevant, from Belarusian to Slovenian, from Spanish to Romanian. It may be useful to recall a truism about the language that we use in this volume, English, since the vast majority of the actors involved did not think in that language (neither do most of the scholars participating in this project). It is important to remember the problems of translation, which were of course very controlled.[21] For instance, in the 1950s, if the word *antiformalism* was exported to every language and dominated the debate in every country, even though its definition may have differed from one language to another and may have recalled different intellectual traditions. The same goes for the crucial category of *partinost* in Russian, *partyjność* in Polish, *Parteilichkeit* in German, *prise de parti* in French (all being hard to translate into English).

It is extremely important to realize that language has been a crucial element in the definition of national identities since early modern times. And the process continued after 1945. Not until after the Second World War was the whole territory of the USSR, with its different republics, finally linguistically unified.[22] In many socialist republics, the second half of the twentieth century is the period when multilingualism (or at least mutual understanding) gradually disappeared. In Bulgaria, for example, the Bulgarian language is imposed on the entire population to the detriment, in particular, of the Turkish language. The decisions taken in 1984 to ban Turkish from the public sphere and to change Turkish names to Bulgarian ones accelerated and made more brutal a long and nonlinear process of assimilation which had begun at the start of the nineteenth century.[23] The Romanian case is also evocative and reminds us that languages are constantly being reinvented. In the 1950s, when Romania was still under Soviet authority, Slavic terms and speech sounds were inserted into Romanian. However, after 1965, when Ro-

21 Iona Popa, *Traduire sous contrainte, littérature et communisme, 1947–1989* (Paris: CNRS Editions, 2010).

22 Juliette Cadiot, Dominique Arel, and Larissa Zakharova, eds., *Cacophonies d'empire. Le gouvernement des langues dans l'Empire russe et l'Union soviétique* (Paris: CNRS Editions, 2010).

23 Nadège Ragaru, "Faire taire l'altérité. Police de la langue et mobilisations linguistiques au temps de l'assimilation forcée des Turcs de Bulgarie (1984–1989)," *Cultures et conflits*, 79–80 (Autumn 2010).

mania distanced itself from Moscow, Romanian was presented more as a Romance language. This evolved into a brutal policy of forcing Hungarian and German speakers from Transylvania to speak Romanian.

Besides the problem of national language, the postwar period brought the issue of the dominant international languages to the fore. In the socialist period, Russian—the language of the socialist revolution—was supposed to be the legitimate international language and was to be learned by all school pupils. But actual knowledge of this language was sometimes very weak and we do not know exactly to what extent Russian was the language of communication. Other dominant languages, such as German, English or French, were often preferred as a result of old intellectual traditions that remained strong and attractive (especially in the case of English) for the younger generation, too.

The linguistic problem concerned not only the official world, but also the artistic work of the avant-gardes. Not to mention abstractions, which attempted to establish a universal visual language beyond particular spoken languages, many creations from the 1960s onward dealt with language, notably conceptual art or mail art. The dominant language was first French in the 1950s; during the following decades it became mainly English, although the English of conceptual art is the expression of an ideal and does not exactly reflect the standard language. But it could be German, too, as in the case of the Slovenian punk group Laibach, the German name for Ljubljana. However, in this specific case, German was not used as a language of communication; instead, its provocative and ironic use recalled the German presence in this part of Europe. A foreign language, first French then English, was more than a vehicle; its use somehow constituted a confrontation.

The geography of art is therefore dependent on a geography of linguistic skills and thus relies on social stratification, since the ability to understand and speak foreign languages is socially unequally distributed.

Socialist Realism/Avant-gardes

The approach in this volume is original by simultaneously considering both socialist realism and modernism/"avant-garde" (or "neo-avant-garde"). It does not isolate the two from each other, as is often the case; instead, it looks

at how the different forms of art (each rendered in all its diversity and complexity) coexisted at the heart of communist movements.

Furthermore, questioning the origins of this historiographical division, as well as the political positioning associated with each art form, is not meaningless. Viewing the avant-gardes merely from the perspective of political dissidence is a relatively recent approach—a change that was evident, in particular, on the occasion of the auction held in 1988 by Sotheby's in Moscow, entitled "Russian Avant-Garde and Soviet Contemporary Art." "Avant-garde" was then dissociated from its ideological content and linked to a national reference, whereas the term "Soviet" merely recalled a period of time. This has been the Western interpretation of these phenomena. A year later, an informal art center opened in the squatter dwellings of Pushkinskaya-10 in Leningrad. Their understanding of "nonconformist" art was much broader and went beyond the strict exclusion of socialist realism.

The number of socialist realist paintings and the interest in this kind of art evolved from 1945 to 1989, on a nonlinear path and at different rhythms, depending on the country. After the Second World War, and even more so after the beginning of the Cold War, every communist country honored socialist realism, according to the term coined in the USSR in the 1930s; and this was also true of Western countries that had powerful communist parties such as Italy, France and Belgium. After Stalin's death, we observe different evolutions due to the various experiences of the de-Stalinization process. Socialist realism became marginal in some countries, especially Poland, but also in Czechoslovakia and Hungary. The shift in Poland, where the belief in the Thaw was stronger than anywhere else, is particularly striking: after an intense interest in socialist realism in the early 1950s, the country abandoned it entirely, in favor of abstraction that represented an art which exemplified de-Stalinization. Other countries, such as the GDR and Bulgaria, continued to defend socialist realism. Revivals of socialist realism can be observed in different situations, such as in Romania after the July Thesis of 1971, which ended the liberal period that Ceaușescu inaugurated in 1965.

The role of the Soviet Union as a model has to be discussed with reference to the general implications of its particular model. At the beginning of our period, communist leaders claimed that Soviet art was the only model; paint-

ings from the USSR were propagandistically shown throughout socialist Europe and presented as the model to imitate.[24] But the actual reception of this art needs to be examined, as we find in archives clues of skepticism toward Soviet art, which was blamed for concentrating too much on political leaders and for generally lacking creative innovation. It would be interesting to know how the few artists who were following the Soviet model were viewed by their colleagues and what price they paid for their complaisance toward the Soviets. Besides, what was shown outside the USSR was not necessarily approved inside the country, among Soviet painters.[25]

By the end of the 1950s, Soviet leaders had defined a new artistic role for the USSR. The importance of the Exhibition of Socialist Countries in Moscow in 1958 must be underlined,[26] not only because on this occasion Poland showed paintings that deviated from socialist realism, but also because the president of the Soviet artists' union, Sergey Gerasimov, declared that socialist realism had to be defined at an international level. He recognized that, besides the USSR, many countries had contributed since 1945 to developing socialist realism. This launched a new phase in the history of socialist realism (actually the third phase, after the first in the 1930s in the USSR, and the second after 1945). In this late phase, the Soviet authorities still observed what was happening in each popular democracy, but intervened more rarely. The Soviet artistic capitals, Moscow and Leningrad, then became less decision-making centers than platforms, where the different communist art worlds could meet. The USSR probably served a more important role as an international meeting place than as a place in which to develop artistic directives.

One of the crucial ideas that we would like to test in this volume can be formulated as follows: socialist realism was less a product decided in Moscow and then imposed upon every part of socialist Europe, than a progres-

24 Antoine Baudin, "'Why Is Soviet Painting Hidden from Us?' Zhdanov Art and Its International Relations and Fallout, 1947–53," in *Socialist Realism without Shores*, ed. Evgeny Dobrenko (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 1997), 227–57.

25 Matthew Cullerne Bown, *Socialist Realist Painting* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998).

26 Susan E. Reid, "The Exhibition *Art of Socialist Countries*, Moscow 1958–9, and the Contemporary Style of Painting," in *Style and Socialism: Modernity and Material Culture in Post-War Eastern Europe*, ed. Susan E. Reid and David Crowley (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 101–32; Susan E. Reid, "Toward a New (Socialist) Realism: The Re-Engagement with Western Modernism in the Krushchev Thaw," in *Russian Art and the West: A Century of Dialogue in Painting, Architecture and the Decorative Arts*, ed. Rosalind P. Blakesley and Susan E. Reid (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2007), 217–39.

Figure 1.1., 1.2., and 1.3.
Triptych by the Belgian groups, Forces Murales and Métiers du Mur,
La marche au socialisme, 1951, triptych, each 230×600 cm.
© Institut d'histoire ouvrière, économique et sociale, Fonds Forces Murales, Seraing.

sive construction resulting from exchanges within Europe. (We will test the idea for the period after 1945, but it may even be relevant for the 1930s.) This is why we intend to write the history of socialist realism from a transnational point of view.[27]

Having formulated the context, creations from satellite states will be taken into account, including the creations from Western countries, such as Italy,[28] Belgium[29] and France[30] where the Communist Party played an important role in intellectual and artistic circles.[31] In comparison with exported Soviet realism, which offered nothing more than an imitation of the Russian Wanderers (*Peredvizniki*) of the nineteenth century, socialist realism from Western Europe appeared more appealing for many reasons. Images from Western countries represented the capitalist world; consequently, they were allowed to depict violence, difficult struggles and political energy (and not merely a forced optimism). On an aesthetic level, they could offer visual solutions to the problems of geometrization of form that concerned so many artists. The popularity in the communist world of Renato Guttuso's paintings about the revolts of Sicilian peasants[32] at the end of the 1940s is significant in this sense. One painting, *Marsigliese Contadina* (1947), bought by the Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest, reveals a strong cubist influence, which displeased the political authorities, including the Italian Communist Party (Togliatti condemned this trend at the exhibition at Palazzo Re Enzo in Bologna in 1948.) Another painting, *Occupazione delle terre incolte in*

27 A first study in this sense concerns socialist realist novels: Michael Scriven and Dennis Tate, eds., *European Socialist Realismo* (Oxford: Berg, 1988).

28 Nicoletta Misler, *La via italiana al realismo. La politica culturale artistica del PCI dal 1944 al 1956* (Milan: Mazzotta, 1974); Anna Caterina Bellati, *Guttuso e i suoi contemporanei russi. Dal realismo sociale al realismo socialista* (Busto Arsizio: Museo della Arti–Palazzo Bandera, 1995).

29 About the group Forces Murales between 1947 and 1957 and the way their art addresses the two linguistic communities that Belgium includes, see Jacqueline Guisset and Camille Baillargeon, eds., *Forces murales. Un art manifeste* (Brussels: Mardaga, 2009).

30 Dominique Berthet, *Le PCF, la culture et l'art* (Paris: La Table ronde, 1990).

31 About England, where the Communist Party was less strong than in neighboring nations but where the artistic debates were also intense, see James Hyman, *The Battle for Realism: Figurative Art in Britain during the Cold War, 1945–1960* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001).

32 The movement to occupy agricultural lands followed the Gullo decrees, which authorized peasants to appropriate unused lands. The movements knew two waves of struggles, from 1946–47 and then from 1949–50. See Lara Pucci, "Terra Italia: The Peasant Subject as Site of National and Socialist Identities in the Work of Renato Guttuso and Giuseppe de Santis," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 71 (2008): 315–34.

Sicilia (1949), immediately bought by the Academy of Arts in East Berlin, offered a compartmentalization of forms and colors which satisfied everyone, probably because it found a third way between Stalinist realism and modernism (cubism, expressionism, Matisse's art, as well as abstraction). This painting, which managed to satisfy and retain the desire for formalization, was at the center of the exhibition that took place during the International Youth Festival in East Berlin in 1951. Such paintings built, in a manner of speaking, an antiformalist formalization. It is in any case undeniable that the artistic scenes to the east of the Iron Curtain observed and commented on (and also imitated when the conditions permitted) what was created in the communist artistic scenes to the west of the Iron Curtain. Similarly, the communist artists of the West found in the East supporters, buyers and interlocutors. We do not want to suggest a division between a fossilized socialist realism in the East and a creative socialist realism in the West—we rather believe it is more appropriate to consider the different creations together and to be mindful of the varied exchanges.

The contributions in this volume try to grasp the originality of socialist realism. The undeniable political solidarity of socialist realism with one or the other communist political system does not mean this art was merely vulgar propaganda. The contributors take on a comprehensive approach to this art and ask why artists, administrators or audiences took an interest in it. From the point of view of the partisans of socialist realism, the time of the avant-gardes was over, the art worlds that had supported artistic production so far (galleries, circles of bourgeois buyers and random state support) were out of date. The different avant-gardes, seen as art of the late bourgeoisie, did not respond to present challenges and the socialist transformation. They promoted only formal and aesthetic revolutions but did not question social imbalances, offering the bourgeoisie the superficial contestation it was ready to tolerate. This explains the hostile discourse against the avant-garde, which varied from aggressive hatred to simple disinterest. Nevertheless, in many socialist realist paintings, we notice quotations from classical avant-gardes (impressionism, cubism, expressionism and surrealism, etc.) of which most of the socialist realist artists were still aware. It is difficult to understand the purpose of these quotations and hybridizations; they may be an attempt to tame modernism or the reemergence of retained modernism.

Socialist realism was therefore supposed to build a countermodernity and be a modern art (but not a modernist one). This modernity consisted not so much in the invention of new forms (socialist realism had to be simple); it was more the involvement of many actors who did not belong to art worlds: the party, mass organizations and the different faces of the working class. This art had to relate to the working class (and no longer be avant-garde). How was one to pay homage to workers and "their" party, which were supposed to be made up of the new rulers and therefore also the art patrons? One essential point was indeed the link with the working class, which cannot be underestimated. The recurrent displacements were a feature of socialist realist production. Artists left artistic centers (either temporarily or permanently) and went to suburban areas or isolated cities. Andrzej Wróblewski left the bourgeois Krakow to observe the construction of Nowa Huta. Viktor Popkov left Moscow to visit the construction sites of Bratsk and to portray its builders. Roger Somville left Brussels for the industrial region of Borinage (where he produced portraits of Belgian, but also Algerian and Polish workers, which were exhibited in Moscow in 1958). Encounters between artists and workers were certainly under surveillance and some workers would have had no interest in such meetings. But they brought art out of legitimate artistic places, while defining workers as art patrons and encouraging them to become amateurs and thus producers of art in turn. Formal meetings did create (sometimes unexpected) connections between art and workplaces. Because it was not based and centered on art worlds, socialist realism can therefore be described as *decentered art*.

Even if it did not represent the actual life of the workers and even if it did not have to satisfy them, socialist realism had to be embedded in the life of the working classes. The *embeddedness* of socialist realism in each local context is still a broad field of study for scholars. Socialist realism varied when it was addressed to Sicilian peasants, to Czech workers who belonged to a red bastion on the outskirts of Prague with a long industrial history, or to Bulgarian former peasants, who had just migrated to an industrial city. The complexity of socialist realism related to the complexity of the working classes in Europe as well as to the various economic and industrial phases through which the different European areas passed.

Despite this variety of contexts, a communist iconography was progressively constructed. What emerged were images of demonstrations, of agita-

tors who excite the crowd, homage to the dead worker[33] and the celebration of communist leaders (one of the most tricky topics, since many people and many artists were reluctant to participate in the idolization of politicians), etc. The study of these iconographic variations with a precise contextualization would certainly contribute to the understanding of socialist realism. Moreover, people involved in the creation of socialist realism from different countries shared similar issues, and they were gathered around the common problems and paradoxes of socialist realism. For instance, the paradox that socialist realism had the mission of indoctrinating working people, but also giving them a feeling of dignity. Another paradox was that socialist realism was to promote the lower classes, but also to offer a cross-class alliance (in this sense, it had to be a "national" art). Because it was an imperative and a doctrine, but at the same time a vague notion, socialist realism led to many discussions and exchanges.

The question of modernism and/or avant-garde (actually neo-avant-garde, to be historically accurate) is even more complicated than socialist realism. Broadly characterized, socialist realism was a concept to homogenize "socialist culture," especially in Eastern Europe, and an instrument to colonize this part of the continent by the USSR; it was the Soviet origin doctrine of Stalinist cultural politics. Modernism and avant-garde art was something different, actually opposing the Stalinization of Eastern Europe, referring both to the international sources, as well the local ones. The first problem, however, is that in contrast to the Western studies, Anglo-American in particular, neo-avant-garde (happening, object and body art, installations and especially conceptual art, etc.) was not so much differentiated from the modernist tradition. In the US, both artists and art critics insisted on a critical approach of the neo-avant-garde toward modernism, both on an aesthetic and a political level; in Eastern Europe they were aware of the aesthetic contradictions, but not necessarily of the political ones. The reason is quite obvious: since socialist realism was seen as the politiciza-

33 Georges Duby, "L'ouvrier mort," in *L'Art et la société* (Paris: Broché, 2002), 1265–71. The French communist painter Edouard Pignon provides an interesting key to understanding the motive of the dead worker: "The dead worker in the painting is not seen as a dead man. He is the starting point of something, the pretext to this solidarity which was, for me, the union of workers." Edouard Pignon, *La quête de la réalité* (Paris: Gonthier, 1966), 50.

tion of art (actually Communist Party propaganda), the artists rejecting the Stalinization of culture were seeking to oppose it in what was known as autonomous art. Modernism was a very good tool with which to conduct such a strategy. Since, however, the trauma of socialist realism did not disappear in the course of the post-Stalinist decades (that is what historians call the Stalinist de-Stalinization[34]), the aesthetic critique of modernism exercised by the neo-avant-garde artists was not followed by a critique of the ideology of the autonomy of art and thus did not result in political critique. On the one hand, because of historical contexts and specific circumstances (different in each country), the autonomy of art was perceived in Eastern Europe as the political attitude against socialist realism, while on the other hand, direct political involvement in art in some countries (such as Poland) was understood to belong to the same realm as socialist realism. Finally, the neo-avant-garde artists rejected modernist aesthetics, but not the modernist ideology of the autonomy of art understood to be the opposition to Stalinism, and post-Stalinism. Of course, "autonomy" did not mean the same thing in every country, and especially not the same in Eastern Europe as in the West. Generally speaking, everywhere it meant that art should not be directly involved in politics. But in contrast to the West, autonomous art in Eastern Europe was not perceived as a means to support the power system. It was seen as an attitude with the intent of subverting the socialist regime, which promoted "political" (read: propaganda) art. However, in the course of years, particularly in Yugoslavia and Poland, such a position became ambiguous, since the cultural agenda adopted a modernist value system and did not insist on supporting socialist realism. Moreover, it seemed that some communist regimes felt more comfortable with "autonomous" art, modernist in particular, than any other. Art historians used to call this "socialist modernism."

The other problem with modernism is that in the West, especially seen from the US perspective, it was perceived as the global cultural strategy of Western—actually American—political hegemony.[35] Seen from the Eastern

34 Martin Damus, *Malerei der DDR, Funktionen der bildenden Kunst im Realen Sozialismus* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rewohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 1991), 123–82.

35 Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom and the Cold War* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1993).

European perspective, however, it was not understood as such; instead, it was seen as a window on an unfamiliar world. Although most of the artists interested in abstract painting saw Paris as the cultural capital of that time—which also was a target of the US policy of cultural domination—they still recognized all Western influences as a sort of liberation from socialist realism, i.e., Stalinist cultural policy. This trend went together with the mythologization of the West as the utopia of freedom. This explains why, when the neo-avant-garde appeared, both in the US and Western Europe, the artists in the East did not buy into its critique of Western, bourgeois culture, since for most of them that culture was more a symbol of freedom than of oppression. Finally, this is the second reason why they rejected the neo-avant-garde political critique and its political involvement (with some exceptions, especially in Hungary), accepting at the same time its aesthetic critique of modernism, mostly abstract painting. At this stage, it should be acknowledged that the way the various art traditions were politically instrumentalized does not only rely on the macro context but mainly on micro situations in which the actors may (or may not) make specific moves.

In brief, socialist realism and avant-garde present two very different kinds of complexity. But both are intimately related to the social history of the societies in which they were born and to the history of the social stratification of socialist societies, from the bottom (the working classes, which were at the same time honored and still marginalized) to the top (the bourgeoisies, which perceived themselves as threatened).

Jeu d'échelles

Scale analysis is a major issue for art geography.[36] Between different scales (local, regional, national, supranational and international), the national one is certainly the most mobilized by scholars, at the time of socialism and today. Socialist countries inherited national frames that were shaped by numerous conflicts in the nineteenth century and in the first half of the twentieth century. They inherited the tension between a glorious idealized past and an allegedly troubled present that invokes nationalism. Competitiveness and wars

36 Jacques Revel, ed., *Jeux d'échelles. La micro analyse à l'expérience* (Paris: Editions de l'EHESS, 1996).

caused nations to define themselves against each other, each one developing the idea of national superiority.[37] The interwar period was "characterized by the hopeless efforts of the nation-states (better characterized as nationalizing states) to create the national societies."[38] The existence of "nation" after 1945 was an obvious fact for the huge majority of the population; the transnational construction of national particularities that began in the eighteenth century was then completed. The end of the Second World War brought about new territorial modifications in Europe (for instance, the territory to the east of the Oder-Neisse line or Bessarabia). But the military domination of the USSR over Eastern Europe and the existence of the Warsaw Pact avoided national tensions; territorial controversies concerned only the border regions of the Soviet Bloc—for instance, the Macedonia that Bulgaria, supported by the USSR, reclaimed for Yugoslavia.

We know that the communist parties did not call national references into question. Since Marx's writings, the construction of nations was seen as a step toward the modernization of society that went with urbanization and industrialization. Furthermore, the planned economy was organized on a national level. Socialist regimes had consequently no reason to break with national narratives. On the contrary, they used them to increase their own legitimacy. The importance of the nation was visible in the erection of various national monuments that mixed socialism and nationalism.

In the form of monuments or other forms, art continued to play an active role in the definition of national identities, as it had done since early modern times.[39] Socialist realism had to be "national in its form, socialist in its content," which validated the idea that each country possesses a "national form." In the second half of the twentieth century, rare were they who questioned the idea that a work of art expresses or somehow reveals national particularities; "great art" was seen as the sign of a "great nation." Art critics and art

37 Miroslav Hroch, *Das Europa der Nationen, die moderne Nationsbildung im europäischen Vergleich* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005); Pavel Kolar and Milos Reznik, eds., *Historische Nationsforschung im geteilten Europa 1945–1989* (Cologne: SH Verlag, 2012). Marius Turda, *The Idea of National Superiority in Central Europe, 1880–1918* (London: Edwin Mellen Press, 2005).

38 Pieter Judson, "Introduction," in *Constructing Nationalities in East-Central Europe*, ed. Pieter Judson and Marsha L. Rozenblit (Oxford, New York: Bergahn Books, 2004), 13.

39 Anthony D. Smith, *The Nation Made Real: Art and National Identity in Western Europe 1600–1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

historians were active protagonists in the nationalization of art, since one of their missions was to explain the national dimension of a work of art.[40]

This present volume is about questioning national "traditions" and "heritages" (in official and unofficial artistic expression): the surrealist tradition in Czechoslovakia, the heritage of abstract geometry in Poland, and that of proletarian realism in the GDR. How were heritages built up? How were some artistic creations selected as "tradition" among all existing ones? Local modern art was especially important, as was the national tradition of realism and architectural historical details. These were the sources (actually "national") of "new" culture. In terms of modernism and avant-garde (actually, it depended on the country) local tradition was sometimes juxtaposed not only with socialist realism, but also with imported modern art from the West. In Poland, this was constructivist or neoconstructivist art, recognized as the "genuine" Polish avant-garde tradition, juxtaposed with "French" Informel, while in Czechoslovakia it was mostly Czech surrealism.

One vivid topic that historiography has overlooked so far is the issue of folklore at the time of socialism. During the entire socialist period, a substantial and stable part of cultural relations between countries concerned exhibitions of folk art: alleged artisanal objects, costumes and headdresses, etc. The socialist period thus revealed a perfect continuity with the nineteenth century and its "invention of traditions." Folk tradition was regarded as the expression of the nation. We still have to understand how and to what extent these exhibitions constructed national images and contributed to the integration of the bloc. Moreover, a better comprehension of socialist folklore could shed new light on "high art" (that is, the art produced within the context of academies and professional societies), on realist production, and also on the avant-garde. Indeed, all of them had a link to peoples' arts and handicrafts whether they rejected this tradition or incorporated and redesigned it.

National scale is not the only scale to be taken into account. Lower down, at a regional level, we observe original configurations, complicating the national frame. It is more interesting to study practices of control, censorship

40 Robert Born, Alena Janatkova, and Adam S. Labuda, eds., *Die Kunsthistoriographien in Ostmitteleuropa und der nationale Diskurs* (Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag, 2004). Michela Passini, *La fabrique de l'art national. Le nationalisme et les origines de l'histoire de l'art en France et en Allemagne 1870–1933* (Paris: Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 2012).

and repression at this level, due to the fact that these measures were the result of continuous negotiations between artists and regional administrations or party sections. Besides, some cities (Timișoara, Leipzig and Tallinn, for instance) asserted themselves and became artistic capital cities. After 1989, we know the process of the "regionalization of art" or even its topography[41]—but we know very little about the situation before 1989 or the root causes of this phenomenon. We have to go lower to observe very local facts, at the level of the neighborhoods, the streets, the apartment buildings, in other words at the level of everyday life.[42] In the case of socialist realism, as we said, this art had to be embedded in everyday life and interact with it (whereas it did not necessarily have to represent it). "Local" and "everyday" were two of the key words and myths of the socialist societies. Communist ideology pretended to operate at this level, to change daily and material life. Socialism risked its legitimacy, in order to provide the whole population with a decent standard of living. Here again, the problem arose for the avant-garde artists too, whose artistic research could take on meaning when rooted in everyday life. In this respect, we are thinking, for example, of the formal research linked to the production of design or in situ performances.

But we also have to go higher, to a supranational level. We find first the recreation of ancient territorial constructions, such as the Baltic Sea (the festival of the Baltic Sea in Rostock in 1965 crossed the Iron Curtain and even included Iceland), or the Balkans (an entity that Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and also Greece contested). Was "Eastern Europe" a relevant supranational category at this time? Did actors use this entity? From the beginning, socialist realism was conceived as an international (and not an Eastern European) artistic project. As for the avant-garde, artists yearned to be part of what was happening abroad. In both cases, the idea of Eastern Europe was a limiting one. All artists desired their range in a broader perspective. The reception of the West German book by Klaus Groh, *Aktuelle Kunst in Osteuropa* (1972),[43] of-

41 Piotr Piotrowski, "Art Criticism in Defence of Regionalisation in Post-1989 Eastern Europe," in *The Regionalisation of Art Criticism: Its Possibility and Interventions in Space* (Taiwan: AICA, 2005), 13–21. Piotr Piotrowski, *Art and Democracy in Post-Communist Europe* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012), 55–79.

42 David Crowley and Susan E. Reid, eds., *Socialist Spaces: Sites of Everyday Life in the Eastern Bloc* (Oxford: Bloomsbury Academic, 2002). The special question related to the issue is that of fashion. See Djurdja Barlett, *Fashion East: The Spectre That Haunted Socialism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010).

43 Klaus Groh, *Aktuelle Kunst in Osteuropa: CSSR, Jugoslawien, Polen, Rumänien, UdSSR, Ungarn* (Cologne: Dumont, 1972).

fers a good example. On the one hand, the quoted artists from Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Poland, Romania, the USSR and Hungary were satisfied that their art was presented and commented on, but on the other hand, many of them felt uncomfortable with this presentation, which placed very different artists side by side and created an artificial Eastern Europe. The space "Eastern Europe" is mainly a creation of Western actors, before 1989 and most importantly after 1989. This geographic category is still problematic today—it has been rejected in recent scholarship, but remains implicitly present. This refusal was the motto of the exhibition *Les promesses du passé* held in Paris in 2010 that exclusively presented artists originating from the area formerly called "Eastern Europe." How far then did this category disappear? "Eastern Europe" is no longer presented as a conglomerate of socialist countries (whether they belonged to the Warsaw Pact or were nonaligned countries or in direct relation to China). The exhibition in Paris was thematic and monographic, underlining the personalities rather than the collective expression, of which the notion of the nation is just one form. Negation of the historiographical notion of "Eastern Europe" can therefore lead to a refutation of national and specific political contextualization. On the contrary, with this volume, we would like to stay away from the category of Eastern Europe without decontextualizing the artistic creations.

Internationalism

Finally, we reach the international scale. The prevailing national vision should not prevent us from looking for signals of international dialogue. International circulation proceeded despite (or more precisely through) national definitions. In this volume, we will investigate how far the exchanges that proceeded *above nations* resulted in considerations that went *beyond nations*.

The notion of internationalism does not refer only to exchanges at the international level; it also has a political content and is inseparable from the communist world, all the more so during the period 1945–89, when the socialist camp was clearly identifiable and in competition with the capitalist camp. The Cold War can be described as the opposition between two universalities. Each side claimed to have universal ambitions, but what was uni-

versalized differed in each case. At the opposite end of democratic and bourgeois universalism, communist internationalism invoked the universality of class struggle. Communist ideology linked local struggles and brought them together in the name of the communist battle against the class enemy: a strike in Italy, the mobilization of workers in a Hungarian factory to exceed the norms of the plan, and the military battles of the Vietnamese were all linked in a global battle. We should not underestimate the role of communist ideology that gave a common basis to actors despite all their differences. Socialist realism, which provided the same visual language for various battles, was able to contribute to this globalization.

The concrete processes of *fabrique de l'universel*[44] were based on several universalizing strategies. The three different strategies of internationalism that appeared after 1917 (the engagement in the world revolution, the defense of the USSR as the homeland of socialism and the humanitarian causes)[45] had different evolutions after 1945.

The first one, the engagement in the world revolution, did not fare well. The figure of the internationalist militant in the postwar period was rarer than it was in the interwar period, during the several revolutions of the 1920s or during the Spanish Civil War. As Europe after 1945 did not experience revolutions, this strategy rarely caused a stir. But it survived in others parts of the world, notably in Latin America. Nevertheless, works of art and monuments could maintain the memory of this kind of involvement.

The second one, the defense of the USSR, was an obvious geopolitical and diplomatic fact: the countries of the Warsaw Pact were protecting the USSR. The fear of a war between the West and the USSR was constantly present, as numerous works of art suggesting a nuclear war are evidence of this. But the involvement of the populations and of the artists in the defense of the USSR was certainly not as great as the socialist regimes expected—the same populations experienced the Soviet occupation after 1945 and faced military interventions, such as in Budapest in 1956 and Prague in 1968. The works of art

44 Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); Pierre-Yves Saunier and Akira Iriye, eds., *Palgrave Dictionary of Transnational History* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

45 Serge Wolikow, "Internationalistes et internationalismes communistes," in *Le siècle des communismes* (Paris: Edition de l'Atelier, 2000), 511–37.

calling for the defense of the USSR were few in number and appear to have been one-offs. It may be that among Western communists the idea of the protection of the USSR remained the strongest.

The third strategy (the humanitarian causes) was the most popular one. Around official causes (Korea, Vietnam, Algeria), which were of course orchestrated, meetings and collections were organized in the socialist countries, in schools, factories and districts. Numerous works of art came with these mobilizations and contributed to the practical construction of internationalism. They also led to artistic identifications; when the Russian artist Sergej Bugaev chose the pseudonym of Afrika in 1986, it was not a mere exoticism.

One possible structure for the book could have been to tackle the problem of centers and peripheries. It would have had the advantage of highlighting inequalities between spaces. There are places that are marked by meeting points and cultural events, and places that are marked by isolation and remoteness. Proximity and distance, even if they are relative concepts—especially where no face-to-face exchanges were involved—did have a specific effect on the creation, diffusion and reception of art.

This method of presentation would have lead to a separation of countries and cities into two rigid categories, recreating and imposing a hierarchy that was surely not as obvious as historians would claim today. What should be made of the places where important events took place, while not representing centers? What should be made of the order expressed by the communist powers to move into territories that lacked cultural facilities—an order that placed the peripheries in the center, so to speak? Such a binary division would have overlooked the dynamic possibilities of marginality and would have reproduced the auto-legitimizing effect of centrality. That is why we preferred to organize the book in four parts.

The first part ("Moving people") investigates displacements of different actors. How did they cross frontiers? What did they expect to find, what did they actually find and what did they retain? What did they bring back? Indeed, this part investigates two very different kinds of moving. On the one hand, temporary displacement: for instance, John Berger's travels to Moscow, Willy Wolf's travels to London or the journeys of artists from the Byelorussian Soviet Republic to Tallinn, St. Petersburg and Krakow. On the other

hand, the emigrations, which were definitive or at least permanent moves: for instance, the migrations of Josep Renau, who was born in Spain, first to Mexico in 1939 and then to the GDR in 1958; or unofficial Hungarian artists who fled to the West. Between the two poles, we find intermediary situations, as that of Gabriele Mucchi from Milan, who for several years taught in the GDR and very often traveled to Czechoslovakia, presenting an original case of an artistic career on each side of the Iron Curtain.

With the second part ("Moving objects"), we want to draw attention to the circulation of works of art. Works of art, and not only people, moved. The contributions give many examples of observations of Soviet realism, Picasso's and Guttuso's paintings or geometrical abstractions. We also want to mention the case of artistic creations without objects, such as performances (like Western Fluxus artists' performances in Prague in 1966). We believe it is crucial to stress this point (the conditions in which art was experienced) in order to understand the specific phenomena hidden behind the sometimes much too evasive word "transfer." Artistic imitations and appropriations are based on the observed images, of the original, a copy or a reproduction.

The third part ("Gathering people") refers to the particular situations in which people (and sometimes works of art, too) were gathered: multinational exhibitions, festivals, biennials, conferences, from the very official exhibitions in Moscow to the informal meeting between Czechoslovakian and Hungarian artists at the Balatonboglár Chapel in 1972. Where and why were these events organized? Did they aim to smooth out diplomatic rivalry on the consensual field of art? And more importantly, what can be considered as an international meeting? The many institutionalized and informal conventions may be seen as a confirmation of national feeling and a validation of the single national narratives. Indeed, some of these meetings used to classify works of art in national sections and some of them were intended to envision alleged national particularities. Internationalization and nationalization could go hand in hand. At the same time, these events offered opportunities for a large variety of persons to meet and get acquainted with a great diversity of objects. They offered occasions to share views about the common concerns we have mentioned. These meetings often shifted the boundaries marked out in each country between what was official and what was unofficial: it was not rare for official meetings to give rise to unofficial contacts, and it was not

rare for art that had been censored within a socialist country to be shown as official art during these meetings. International events were thus complex events in which national definitions of art mixed with the conventional view of friendship between peoples and chance encounters—the outcomes, often unexpected, are worth examining.

The last part ("Defining Europe") broadens our outlook and asks how communist movements in Europe regarded spaces outside Europe. As we have said, in order to understand European circulation, we have to place them inside global networks. This part investigates the relationships with other socialist powers (China, Mexico or Cuba) and the anticolonialist discourse. Communist artists frequently traveled throughout the rest of the world, bringing back images and creating images based on what they had seen. These images fueled a certain orientalism—an orientalism with a socialist veneer, which could be called "a socialist orientalism"—the "Orient" being part of the Soviet world (notably Central Asia) or outside the Soviet World. The anticolonialist views held by the communist authorities could go hand in hand with a form of paternalism, expecting of the rest of the world to follow the path marked out by the socialist countries, even if the various parts of the world were not virgin territory where the two camps, capitalist and communist, were able to confront each other as they pleased. They were all embedded in a history: some, in Africa and Asia, were engaged in the process of decolonization; others were international powers, such as China, or socialist countries that already had a long experience of revolution, such as Mexico. Moreover, some parts of the world could not recognize themselves as belonging to either the capitalist or the communist universalism and contested their universalizing strategies. Finally, these countries did not necessarily occupy a peripheral position. Mexico, for example, was seen by many European artists as one of the key centers of socialist art, a place where the most interesting proposals were developed in terms of public art, popular art and revolutionary art.

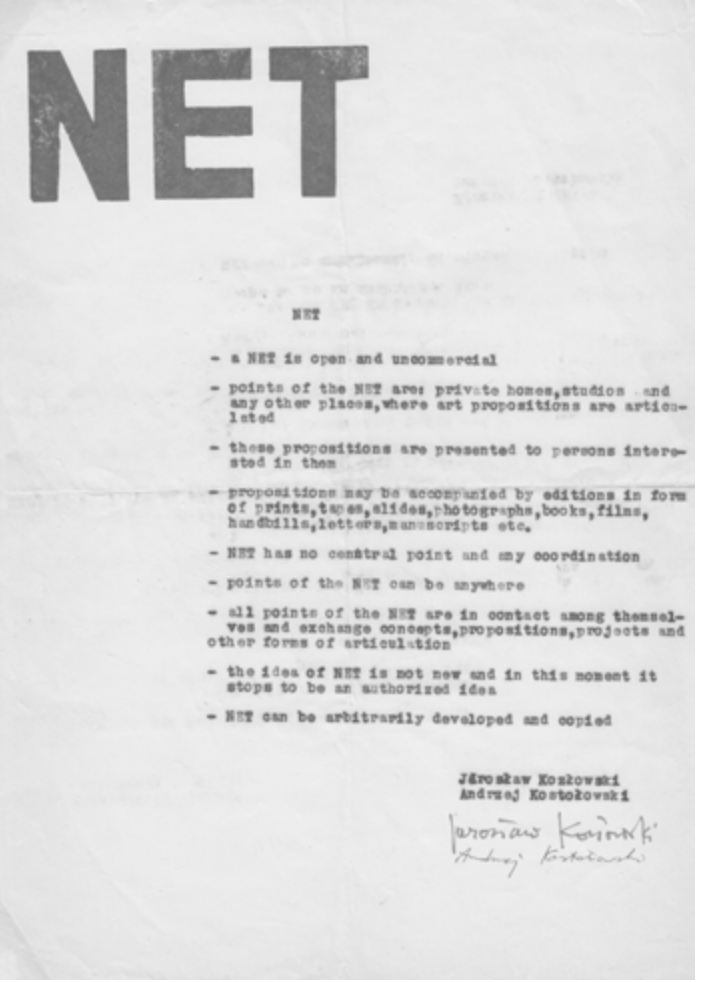
With thirty-five contributions, the present volume gathers an unusually high number of texts. Most of them are case studies on a single artist, image, exhibition, meeting, etc. From the outset, the project was conceived as a kaleidoscopic research work, bringing together advanced scholars and PhD

students exploring mostly unknown fields of studies and giving original insights into archives, images and interpretations. A discrepancy of style, backgrounds and sensibility to the current trends of human sciences cannot be avoided—we did not try to mask it, on the contrary we consider it to be a strength. It reflects the diversity of the academic community writing on art history across present-day Europe. And it gives a better picture of the diversity of exchanges, thanks to substantial and contextualized analysis. We must reiterate that this volume is a long way from being comprehensive and cannot provide a complete atlas of exchanges. For example, we only hint at one of the most important initiatives concerning the internationalization of art in the socialist countries—the NET in Poland. In 1971, Jarosław Kozłowski, an artist, and Andrzej Kostołowski, an art critic (who withdrew within a couple of years), invented a global network of artists (and some art critics) who wanted to exchange works of art, letters, articles, books, catalogs, postcards, journals and pictures (i.e., photographs and photocopies, etc).[46] Ultimately, over the course of more than a dozen years, a few hundred people from both Eastern and Western Europe, the US and Canada, Latin America and Asia (mostly Japan), and a few from Israel, Australia and New Zealand, participated in this initiative. Based on these contacts, Jarosław Kozłowski founded the Gallery Akumulatory 2 in Poznań a year later, showing many artists from the NET list—the most international, even global gallery in Eastern Europe. Of course, another important gallery in Poland, the Foksal Gallery in Warsaw, was also international; however, the curators were almost exclusively interested in Western art. They held only one exhibition from Eastern Europe, of Hungarian art (April/May 1971), while Akumulatory 2 exhibited Czech, Hungarian and GDR artists a couple of times. One could also find some artists from other "peripheries," such as South America.[47]

Although the panorama is incomplete, we hope nonetheless that the perspectives highlighted contribute to a better understanding of the importance of communist Europe in the political economy of art during the second half

46 Bożena Czubak and Jarosław Kozłowski, *NET—Art of Dialogue/Sieć—Sztuka Dialogu* (Warsaw: Profile Foundation, 2012).

47 We could only find comparable geographical orientation in Yugoslavia, but curators did work under different circumstances there. On the Akumulatory 2 gallery, see Bożena Czubak and Jarosław Kozłowski, eds., *Beyond Corrupted Eye: Akumulatory 2 Gallery, 1972–1990* (Warsaw: Zacheta National Gallery, 2012).



NET

NET

- a NET is open and uncommercial
- points of the NET are: private homes, studios and any other places, where art propositions are articulated
- these propositions are presented to persons interested in them
- propositions may be accompanied by editions in form of prints, tapes, slides, photographs, books, films, handbills, letters, manuscripts etc.
- NET has no central point and any coordination
- points of the NET can be anywhere
- all points of the NET are in contact among themselves and exchange concepts, propositions, projects and other forms of articulation
- the idea of NET is not new and in this moment it stops to be an authorized idea
- NET can be arbitrarily developed and copied

Jarosław Kozłowski
Andrzej Kostołowski

Figure 1.4.
Andrzej Kostołowski and Jarosław Kozłowski, *NET*, 1972.
Courtesy of Jarosław Kozłowski.

of the twentieth century. And we hope to continue reflecting on the links between ideology and art. Academic works on the capitalist side have shown the relevance of a precise analysis of universalizing ideology.[48] To insist on the influence of ideology and to understand its declinations does not impoverish

48 Guilbaut, *How New York*; Nancy Jachec, *The Philosophy and Politics of Abstract Expressionism, 1940–1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

the analysis of works of art; on the contrary, it enriches such an analysis. The issue for us is neither to rehabilitate nor to define an artistic quality since that would lead to search beyond ideology; on the contrary, we hope to offer a better understanding of ideologies, taking into consideration their ambitions, their contradictions and their concrete applications.

This project was prepared by the Centre Marc Bloch (Franco-German Research Centre for the Social Sciences in Berlin), which we would like to thank for its help. A very special word of thanks goes to Beatrice von Hirschhausen for her constant support and expertise on specific aspects of cultural geography and to Estelle A. Maré for her help. It was financed by the Gerda Henkel Foundation and the Fundacja Współpracy Polsko-Niemieckiej/Stiftung für deutsch-polnische Zusammenarbeit.

2

The Moscow Underground Art Scene in an International Perspective

Lola Kantor-Kazovsky

That the formation of the Moscow avant-garde milieu of the late 1950s and 1960s was stimulated by contacts with the West has long been recognized. However, the relations between this trend and Western art have yet to be mapped out. My approach will be first to adumbrate the ideology and structure of the Moscow avant-garde group (often called "underground" or "nonconformist") as a response to impulses that came from the West, and then to analyze the ideas that this art induced in three major European art critics who visited Moscow in the mid- and late 1960s.

Cultural relations between the USSR and other countries during Khrushchev's Thaw were governmentally supported and explicitly charged with political propaganda on both ends. These purposes, however, do not exhaust the content and meaning of the contact between the art worlds thus allowed. The Moscow public became acquainted with the contemporary art of the West through a series of traveling exhibitions, in which abstract expressionism presented the strongest challenge to the audiences.[1] By the time these exhibi-

1 At the Sixth World Festival of Youth and Students in 1957 one could even see artists at work, among others Gary Coleman, who demonstrated the method of action painting: Igor Golomstok and Alexander Glezer,

tions reached Moscow, abstract expressionism was no longer the newest artistic trend in America and the Western world, while more recent art, such as neo-Dada and other new developments were not exhibited at these shows. However, the exposure to the works of Pollock, Rothko and Motherwell at the American National Exhibition and abstract expressionism's growing popularity in the world came like an explosion. My use of a military simile in this context is an intentional reference to the discourse on abstract expressionism as a "cultural Cold War" weapon.[2] According to Max Kozloff and other scholars, the choice of abstract art to represent the US and its effect abroad had been calculated long before: this trend had conquered the world since 1940s, in no small measure because it figured prominently in traveling shows of American art which received institutional backing from the CIA and the UCIA. These agencies used this art for propaganda abroad, realizing that it was the first original American trend and that it could convey liberal ideas of individual freedom and free initiative. This background must be taken into account with the corrections suggested by Nancy Jachec. As she has shown, the overlapping of these institutional goals with the position of the artists who let these institutions promote their works was inevitably partial. This is true even when political ideals are concerned. As Jachec describes the development of the artists belonging to the milieu, the influence of existentialist philosophy led them to substitute a subjective vision and the creative act for the leftist ideology of collective political agency with which they formerly aligned themselves. Their transcendental approach to individual subjectivity still had a connotation of social critique or "private revolt" that was contiguous with the governmental liberal stance, but not identical with it.[3]

Soviet Art in Exile (New York, 1977), 89. This show was followed by "Art of the Socialist Countries," in 1958. See Susan E. Reid, "The Exhibition *Art of Socialist Countries*, Moscow 1958–9, and the Contemporary Style of Painting," in *Style and Socialism: Modernity and Material Culture in Post-War Eastern Europe*, ed. Susan E. Reid and David Crowley (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 101–32. The most important show was the art section at the National Exhibition of the USA (1959). It included Pollock's *Cathedral* as well as works by other abstract artists, and was followed by the National Exhibition of France (1961). See Nancy Jachec, *The Philosophy and Politics of Abstract Expressionism, 1940–1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 216–18; *"Drugoe iskusstvo": Moskva 1956–1988* (Moscow, 2005), 76.

2 Max Kozloff, "American Painting during the Cold War," *Artforum* 11 (1973): 43–54; Eva Cockroft, "Abstract Expressionism, Weapon of the Cold War," *Artforum* 12 (1974): 39–41; Saunders Frances Stonor, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (New York: New Press, 2000), 253–78.

3 Jachec, *Philosophy and Politics*, Chapter 2. The interpretation of action painting as "private revolt," is Harold Rosenberg's.

People in the USSR responded to this complex political message with a vigorous ideological and aesthetic debate. Beyond the familiar problematic of representation in abstract art, its contemporary political and philosophical connotations featured prominently in Soviet discourse.[4] Abstract expressionism's embracing alienation and being in conflict with the outer world was noticed and mocked by official criticism,[5] while abstract form's potential for modernizing the environment was discussed by the left wing of the official Union of Artists.[6] The connotations of political liberalism, the emphasis on the individual and the call for freedom of expression were taken up at the nonofficial left end of the spectrum.

Unavoidably, as soon as anything resembling a political spectrum appeared in Soviet culture, it was almost the mirror image of the Western system: thus, the position of the radical Soviet "left" intelligentsia did not correspond to the Western left, but to the anticommunist liberal stance. This must be taken into account when studying the nonofficial trend of Moscow "left artists" as they called themselves.[7] By the mid- and late 1960s the trend already had a history and a certain number of achievements. Recently, an attempt has been made to map the nonofficial Soviet art scene, treating it inclusively and recording all the artists influenced by abstract expressionism.[8] However, the critics who visited the Soviet Union in the 1960s described the "left" trend's structure more or less unanimously in a different way. In their writing, the same relatively few personalities are mentioned as being active in Moscow and working differently in terms of the styles and techniques they used.[9] Among them were painters,

4 See Reid, "The Exhibition Art of Socialist Countries"; Jane A. Sharp, "Abstract Expressionism as a Model of 'Contemporary Art' in the Soviet Union," in *Abstract Expressionism: The International Context*, ed. Joan Marter (New Brunswick, NJ, and London: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 84–87.

5 Piotr Sokolov-Skalia, "Ukhod ot pravdy zhizni," *Rabotnitsa* 8 (1959): 23–34; Vladimir Kemenov, "Sovremennoe iskusstvo SSHA na vystavke v Moskve," *Sovetskaia kul'tura* 11 (1959); cf. Sharp, "Abstract Expressionism," 85.

6 They were trying to make the abstract qualities of folk art and of architectural design their weapon in the struggle for the liberalization of the art scene. See S. Rappoport, "Abstraktnaia forma v dekorativno-prikladnom iskusstve i abstraktsionism," *Iskusstvo* 9 (1959): 36–42.

7 Mikhail Grobman, "Vtoroi russkij avant-garde," *Zerkalo* 29 (2007): 52–57.

8 Sharp, "Abstract Expressionism."

9 John Berger, "The Unofficial Russians," *Sunday Times Magazine*, 6 November 1966, 44–45; Jindřich Chalupecký, "Moderní umění v SSSR," *Výtvarná práce*, 21 September 1967); Raoul-Jean Moulin, "De l'art révolutionnaire des années 20 à la recherche d'un nouvel art soviètique," in *L'art Russe*, ed. Louis Réau (Paris, 1968), 278–84; Jane Nicholson, "La nouvelle gauche à Moscou," *Chroniques de l'art vivant*, 23 September 1971, 9–14; Michel Ragon. "Peinture et sculpture clandestines en U.R.S.S," *Jardin des arts* (July-August 1971): 4–6; Jindřich Chalupecký, "Moscow Diary," *Studio International* (February 1973): 81–96.

sculptors and graphic artists, some of whose work was abstract, some figurative, and some halfway between the two—so their connection to the experience of abstract art, which they all admired, was not always in plain view. The artists themselves aver that the group was small and highly selective, and that adherence to American abstraction or to any other stylistic vein did not confer membership in it. Rather, in order to be recognized, artists had to demonstrate a coherent artistic individuality, to show their ability to produce an idiom independent of external influences. To practice tachism or action painting as such was deemed inferior.[10]

All the artists of the "left" signed up to the requirement of individuality. It is here that the influence of American abstract expressionism is most evident, and where the American artists became their models. The political outlook of the "left" was complex and intertwined with their artistic ideology. The artists for the most part denied the political meaning of their work altogether, in order to distinguish their position from that of the collective agency of the dissidents. But the political meaning was there to be found, in an implicit or encoded form. They offered their individualistic freedom in opposition to the collectivist ideology of communist society, and art was the medium through which their "private revolt" was best pursued. Within their art each of these artists strove to create a "signature style" of sorts. To be read as authentic, this idiom was to be connected to the artist's persona and his or her unconscious, or rationalized, subjectivity, which would then be revealed in idiosyncratic behavior, or in a personal philosophy. The group was famous for both the inimitable conduct of some of its members and the philosophical interests and metaphysical quests pursued by others. Michail Grobman whose work was highly personal in meaning as well as in style, may serve as an example. Since the mid-1960s his imagery contained a built-in philosophical narrative derived from the amalgamation of Malevitch's theories with Jewish Cabbala, about the energy of creation present in the avant-garde image. Grobman's pictographic, semi-figurative style combined geometry with biomorphic motifs, often representing the very act of Creation.[11] The "sub-

10 Ilya Kabakov, "Apologia personalisma v iskusstve 60-h godov," in *60-ye-70-ye: Zapiski o neofizialnoy zhizni v Moskve* (Moscow, 2008), 174–242; Michail Grobman, "Vtoroi russkij avant-garde," *Zerkalo* 29 (2007): 52–57.

11 His openly declared Jewish identity was also a unique "signature" stance in the cultural milieu of Moscow. For Grobman's theories, see "Leviathan. Manifesty I Fragmenty," *Zerkalo* 19–20 (2002): 193–212.

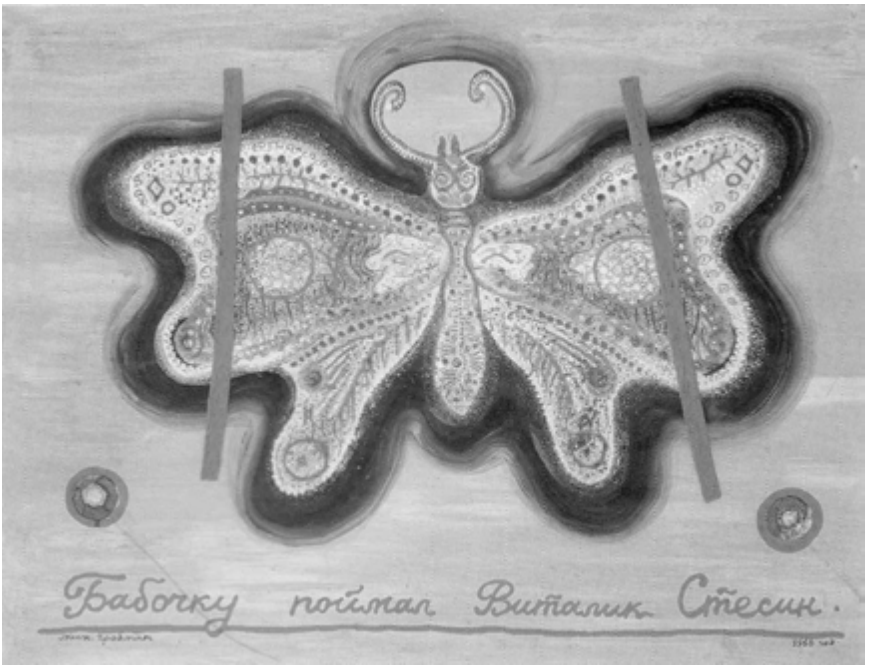


Figure 2.1.
Michail Grobman, *Vitaly Stesin Has Caught this Butterfly,* 1966.
Tempera on carton, 47×62,3 cm. Collection of Ludwig Museum, Cologne.

lime" mode characteristic of the core members of this group was criticized by the next generation, which preferred to operate within the realm of language and social critique, but this mode continued to be present in Moscow art as a meaningful subtext.

We can therefore say that the theme shared by modernist artistic milieus on both sides of the Iron Curtain was that of the freedom of the individual. While the American artists were exploring and glorifying subjectivity proper, their Moscow colleagues, 15 to 20 years later, merged this subjective content with impulses that came from various other traditions. Individual freedom and liberation from collective politics and from mass mentality remained one of the central topics of art on both sides for the remainder of the century. However, since the 1960s this philosophy that underpinned the left avant-garde practices in both the East and West was, as I mentioned earlier, connected to the different, if not completely reversed political agendas of

each side, which made the premises they shared not easily recognizable on the opposite side. This political difference was like a transparent screen substituted for the former curtain. Looking through it, most of the critics who wrote on the Moscow "left" and described its complex relations with the official Soviet art world rarely felt the relevance of this topic to their own concerns.

Unlike them, the three writers whom I will discuss below found that the Moscow group was important in their theoretical quest to define the current artistic situation. It was a moment when formalist avant-garde art went through its crisis and new radical art practices appeared that rejected art objects altogether. The idea of the "end of art" was often heard. What these three critics saw in Moscow became a part of the discussion of the role and the future of art in contemporary society. The conclusions they reached were mixed—for Michel Ragon and John Berger their Moscow essays were among their last art-critical writings proper. Ragon went on to focus mainly on architecture, while Berger's next important work was *Ways of Seeing* (1972), one of the first theoretical post-WWII books presenting the visual arts from a neo-Marxist perspective, emphasizing the social function of images.[12]

The success of *Ways of Seeing* was due to Berger's Marxist premises that were in many points consonant with the philosophy of the new art practices, for conceptual artists also referred to hidden ideology expressed through images. They renounced making art objects in order to impede the commodification of art by the capitalist art market, thus reaffirming the critique that had been advanced by Berger in the 1950s in his articles for the *New Statesman*. The main character of Berger's very first novel, *A Painter of Our Time* (1958), also called his paintings "another commodity that nobody needs," and claimed that art collectors had usurped the privilege of looking at works of art by purchasing them for money, while the real addressees of art are men of action, or "heroes." Berger presented as unavoidable the artist's alienation from society by market forces. By making his character give up painting, return to political activity and die in Hungary in 1956, Berger actually foresaw the "end of art" of the 1960s. His solution to this cul-de-sac, which he stuck to even years later, was to break out of the confines of the West, as his character did. Thus, in the mid-1960s, in his monograph on Picasso, Berger returned

12 John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1972) is the book version of his BBC television series.

to the idea that artists must turn away from the nonheroic, capitalist world of goods consumers where even the most talented decline because they do not feel they have the addressees.[13] Although Berger's confidence that the late Picasso could find inspiration in the developing world was misplaced, his analysis was much more realistic when he extended it in the opposite geographical direction, to the Moscow left.

As a Marxist, Berger had visited Moscow several times, but he was not deceived by the official culture of the Soviet Union.[14] In 1966 he discovered the "left" milieu at the peak of its activity, and was attracted by the artists' particular form of political involvement. His first connection was with the sculptor Ernst Neizvestny, in whom Berger found his ideal, an artist and a hero in the same person: Neizvestny fought and had nearly been killed in WWII, and later confronted Khrushchev at the Manège exhibition of 1962. Berger wrote a book about Neizvestny, which turned him—purposefully or not—into the opposite of Picasso. While the leitmotif of Berger's book on Picasso was that after cubism he always had trouble finding significant subjects, in his interpretation of Neizvestny, Berger emphasized the sculptor's obsession with the urgent subject of the human body under the new conditions of modern warfare and the paradoxical reversal of the traditional humanistic idea of heroism in his works.[15]

In his article "The Unofficial Russians" (1966) in the *Sunday Times Magazine*, Berger explicitly compared the situation of art in Moscow and in the West. He began his essay from what he saw as the hedonistic and purposeless approach to art-making in London. The Moscow "left" milieu, in comparison, thrived in an atmosphere of ambitious aspiration. Whether artists strove to show the human body from within, or composed a thesaurus of secondary images, or revealed the incongruity of commonplace situations, their art was filled with purpose: "Art for art's sake they call 'professional' and despise," he wrote.[16] Beyond the reach of art market mechanisms and in the absence of state support, their modernist work had a genuine social connection. This fas-

13 John Berger, *The Success and Failure of Picasso* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1965).

14 As he wrote, he gave up his former "polarized dogmatism" after the Hungarian and Polish uprisings. See John Berger, *Permanent Red* (London: Methuen, 1960), 8.

15 John Berger, *Art and Revolution: Ernst Neizvestny and the Role of the Artist in the USSR* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969).

16 Berger "Unofficial Russians," 51.

cinated Berger, who saw their work as important art by definition, because, as he wrote, "what matters, is the need that art answers."[17] At the end of the article he formulated his view of the main purpose of this art movement as a whole. The official style of Soviet art, he wrote, was created out of fear of the unrecognizable and of changing reality, and it enchanted the masses with a naturalistic, recognizable, finished world, while the artists of the Moscow left presented the public with "an exercise in mutual responsibility toward the unfinished nature of all experience."[18] This conclusion is similar to the post-modern artistic critique of the culture industry (to which socialist realism is implicitly compared), years before this criticism was made.

Ragon, too, was looking for a balance between the inherent content of art and its social function when he visited Moscow, but he wrote a strikingly different account of what he saw, because his philosophy and position in the art world were different. He was mainly connected to Art Informel and to other trends that developed out of the denial of the old Paris School and of cubism. His major book, *25 ans d'art vivant* (1969), reflects his appreciation of modernism with romantic and expressionist origins as well as his growing anxiety about its future. In the final chapters, he wrote that *art vivant* can and should integrate into the social milieu and speak to people not only from its elitist position. He approved of its inclusion in the urban environment and of its merging with scientific approaches, while explicitly criticizing the growing tendency of introducing social content and social action into art. He was particularly interested in kinetic art and in its ability to create public spectacle while keeping qualities of abstraction. Ragon's visit to Moscow in 1971 was connected to his interest in the kinetic group Dvizhenie, on which he wrote a special essay for *Cimaise*. Lev Nusberg, its leader, gave him a wider perspective on Moscow art, providing him with information and insights that Ragon used immediately in his book *L'art: pour quoi faire?* (1971).

This book was largely devoted to his explicit polemics with the radical trends of the 1960s. As sociological background he provided a despairing view of technocratic civilization, in which true art and culture had been displaced by different types of entertainment and to which the socialist society of the USSR, with its declared support of culture, provided no alternative, as

17 Berger, *Art and Revolution*, Preface.
18 Berger "Unofficial Russians," 51.

Figure 2.2.
Michel Ragon in Moscow.
The first row: Alexander Grigoriev, Michail Grobman, Irina Vrubel-Golubkina.
The second row: Françoise Ragon, Michel Ragon, Lev Nusberg.
Private collection, Tel Aviv.

Soviet socialism was created in the same spirit of bourgeois technocracy. If art's displacement from contemporary life was not enough, it was condemned to death by the Western art world itself that agreed that art was coming to its end. The new art trends, which he saw as directly involved in political contest, were subject to the problems of subversive political movements, such as the spirit of conformism and isolation from society at large. In sum, this "cultural guerrilla" was in his view another of the symptoms of the technocratic "conspiracy" against culture, not its antidote. Because of their inherent similarity, artists who pursued a radical "anticareer" finally became enmeshed in

the same institutions as those who had pursued a nonantagonistic career. In Ragon's view, the substitution of political contest for art was a mistaken strategy, because art was capable of creating *un monde autre*, which is the only true revolutionary opposition to technocracy.

In his essay devoted to Moscow art, "Peinture et sculpture clandestines en U.R.S.S." (1971), Ragon was mostly skeptical where Berger had been mostly enthusiastic in describing the individualistic politics of the Moscow "left." His article is full of mixed feelings. In *L'art: pour quoi faire?* he had already defined the Moscow left as "underground," which for him meant a rebellious group excluding itself from society and developing its own cultural niche.[19] In his Moscow essay he often sounds suspicious that the result of their rebellion is precisely a sort of "anticareer." He opposes Berger implicitly by showing that Neizvestny was not sent to prison after the Manège affair but was invited to meet with Khrushchev in private, that he could sell his works to art collectors and have exhibitions abroad, in addition to Berger's own monograph about him. He checked the living conditions of Ely Beliutin and Vladimir Yankilevsky, the two other participants in the Manège affair, and found that the first had an outstanding studio while the second made a living as a graphic artist. The work of several other artists he did not find really modern or avant-garde by his artistic standards, and he wrote that their political isolation was a mistake. Dvizhenie was for him the exception that proved the rule. In their case, he approved of the state support they received as they were allowed to perform at public events, while at the same time they were the only group in Moscow that had broken with easel painting.

True art, both Berger and Ragon assumed, had to be anticapitalist. Their sympathy with Moscow artists, who had the reverse political outlook, was made possible through a generalization of the negative effects of power in both political camps. The third critic, Jindřich Chalupecký, was an entirely other case. His early essay, "The Intellectual under Socialism" (1948), devoted to his experience of the revolution in Czechoslovakia, can serve as an introduction to the political philosophy of dissent on the socialist side of the curtain, as the reverse of that of the European

19 Ragon, *L'art: pour quoi faire?*, 88–89.

left.[20] He showed that the hopeful expectations of the intelligentsia that socialism would eliminate "cultural indifference, social injustices and economic inequalities" were misplaced, for those who were liberated from oppression were not only oppressed again by the totalitarian socialist state, but also became oppressors of each other, and socialist power paralyzed intellectual life as a part of its political ideology. The discovery that it was not the power per se that obstructed human freedom, but something that still required analysis, brought him to the realization that freedom is an inner quality, not an external condition. His philosophy, influenced by German existentialism, led him to concentrate on art as a special liberating practice, and this position made him a kindred spirit of Moscow left artists.

Chalupecký visited the USSR in 1967 as a member of an official delegation of critics. His newspaper account of this visit concludes, unexpectedly, with a manifesto of sorts:

> Art must return to its proper function, which is not to instruct or to correct life. . . . Its deepest purpose is to glorify life, to create the space where life can glorify itself. Art is to be made so that people may realize why life is worth living fully and entirely. Beyond logic and ethical concerns, this is art's wisdom and mission.[21]

This passage opposed not only socialist realism, but also any type of art's active engagement in social critique. Art's social mission was to provide people with genuine life experiences which they, under their given circumstances and constraints, do not really have. Chalupecký saw this as the essential, inner way toward liberation.

One of the problems with Chalupecký's position was that art escapes precise definition, and aestheticism has to adjust itself to the dynamic development of modern art's forms. Chalupecký was aware of this, and dwelled on the dynamism and plurality of contemporary aesthetic experience, to the extent that he was even ready to drop the very word "artist" from his text when

20 See the English translation: Jindřich Chalupecký, "The Intellectual under Socialism," in *Primary Documents: A Sourcebook for Eastern and Central European Art since the 1950s* (New York: MIT Press, 2002), 29–37.

21 Chalupecký, "Moderní umění v SSSR"; a French version was published as "Ouverture à Moscou," in *Opus International* 4 (1967): 22–25.

new forms of creativity, such as the technological performances of Dvizhenie, were discussed.[22] However, his central Moscow experience was not Dvizhenie but the painter Vladimir Yakovlev, to whom he devoted an essay in the same year.[23]

Yakovlev's abstract and semi-abstract work was much in demand. Chalupecký estimated that he produced 3,500 works in ten years, of which only a small number remained in his hands. This amount of work he accomplished despite suffering from a severe eye disease. Half-blind and lacking basic living conditions, yet still producing influential art, it was his figure that gave rise to Chalupecký's reflection on art's nature and purpose. He wrote on art as the place of solution for the contradiction between transcendental freedom and its opposite, the world in which man physically lives. Yakovlev's life was a metaphor for "the insatiable hunger that man's freedom has for the world and that makes a man an artist." Even Yakovlev's worsening eyesight could not affect his production because sight is only one specialized sense in the synthetic action of the brain, which is an undifferentiated perception of "one's presence in the world." Yakovlev's subtle paintings balance on "the imprecise limit between optic impression and pure event of color," and are expressive precisely of these deep levels of an existential self "made visible" in his work. It is the precision of his intimations about these levels that drew viewers and fertilized a wide circle of artists. Chalupecký's final words sum up his position:

> The world is alien and presses on us, and we don't know where to put our infinite freedom. But it's not the world which is the problem. It is we who are half-blind, imperfect. . . . Yakovlev's work is an itinerary of the soul, of its imprisoned blindness, of the sufferings of its struggle and of the liberation that is achieved within the world and not without it.

Guided by his philosophy of freedom as it is achieved through art, Chalupecký made long-lasting connections with artists grouped around Yakovlev. In his essay "Moscow Diary," written after his private visit to Moscow in 1972, he again connected the aesthetic experience they sought to the

22 Ibid.
23 Jindřich Chalupecký, "Zázrak videní," *Výtvarné umˇení* 6 (1967): 284–85.

feeling of mission: "They are involved in something which is no longer mere art, something far more precious than art and even more important than life itself."[24] He was aware of the differences between this existential aestheticism and the leading tendencies in Western art in the early 1970s.[25] One of his final remarks concerned Grobman's emigration to Israel. "An artist who grew up in the Soviet Union, living in Israel or in Western Europe—how he can live there, for what? However parallel the artistic development in both parts of the world, the moral coordinates of artistic experience there and here are different."

However, the gap between the two art worlds was not in fact unbridgeable. Things were changing rapidly. One of these changes was that the art market began its penetration of the Moscow scene. Foreigners began buying nonofficial art, and their demand influenced production. Grobman's emigration was caused, in particular, by the sense that commercial art abounded and that the first momentum of the "left" was already exhausted. New and different artistic tendencies came to the fore afterward, and they were recorded by Chalupecký, who wrote about works in which social content began to surface. He found Eric Bulatov's paintings similar with photorealism, and wrote of Ilya Kabakov's work as "one of the most original and truly contemporary examples of current world art."[26] But would Kabakov's existential tension in representing recognizably socialist reality be relevant for a viewer unfamiliar with this reality?

The answer to this and other questions can already be given. When Kabakov emigrated in 1987 he soon achieved great success. His different political outlook did not cause a problem, because he spoke to the Western world precisely about the Soviet life and mentality, the analysis of which became the main topic of his art.[27] Grobman chose a more complex strategy of integration. He came to Israel with a political agenda, individualistic aesthetics and a personal philosophy based on Jewish mysticism, which were alien if not opposite to that of the Israeli left. In Israel his interest in Jewish heritage was

24 Chalupecký, "Moscow Diary," 85.

25 This is why he now described these artists as pursuing the traditions of the Russian avant-garde rather than following Western trends.

26 Chalupecký, "Moscow Diary," 85.

27 Cf. Amy Ingrid Schlegel, "The Kabakov Phenomenon," *Art Journal* 58 (1999): 98–101.

identified with the political right—yet he did not belong to that stream either. His choice thus put him in opposition to the entire local system of values, and he castigated Israeli mainstream art for its lack of originality, for following the paths well trodden in the West, and for its inability to create an idiom of modern art on the basis of Jewish thought.[28] His reputation as an Israeli artist was established when he fulfilled this complex program with a small group of followers and retold his Cabalistic narrative on the energy of the Creation in the contemporary language of performance and photography.[29]

28 See his article on Rafi Lavi: Michail Grobman, "Lavi, mekomi aval lo Israeli," *Maariv*, *Ha shavua*, 14 June 1991, 63.

29 *Leviathan* (Kibbutz Ashdot Ya'akov: Uri and Rami Nechushtan Museum, 1978).

3

The British Art Critic and the Russian Sculptor: The Making of John Berger's *Art and Revolution*

Kai Artinger

John Berger was one of the best-known leftist art critics in Great Britain in the 1950s. He traveled several times to the USSR and was one of the few Western authors who wrote on Russian sculpture and art in the Cold War. His book, *Art and Revolution: Ernst Neizvestny and the Role of the Artist in the USSR*, published in 1969, is a remarkable example of the way in which Western intellectuals viewed Russian art and the situation of artists.[1] Apart from this, the book has a fascinating genesis.

The British art critic and the Russian sculptor got to know each other in Moscow in January 1962. Berger was impressed by Neizvestny's sculptures and drawings. Back home he emphatically wrote two newspaper articles.[2] Berger thought Neizvestny was "the first visual artist of genius to have emerged in the Soviet Union since the twenties." The year of the first encounter was fateful for the sculptor in other respects, too. He met the party lead-

1 John Berger, *Art and Revolution: Ernst Neizvestny and the Role of the Artist in the USSR* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969).

2 John Berger, "A Revelation from Russia," *The Observer Weekend Review*, 28 January 1962); John Berger, "A Modern Mind at Work," *Daily Worker*, 10 March 1962.

er and the head of the government, Khrushchev, at the first exhibition of abstract art in Moscow in November. This meeting catapulted the artist into a hopeless situation, which gave Berger the grounds to write his book about Neizvestny. It was directed at a Western public that knew almost nothing about Russia and this "art dissident."

Berger was Marxist at that time—and he still is.[3] He sought to take account of the geo-political circumstances.[4] Although not a member of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), he sympathized with it. Then the crimes of Stalinism became well known and Russia crushed the Hungarian revolt in 1956. Berger still stuck by the Soviet Union as most Western communists did. Berger orientated himself toward the strategies of the CPGB, he participated in its discussions and wrote contributions to its newspaper, the *Daily Worker*. It was there that one of his articles on Neizvestny was published. Berger also had close contact with communist émigrés who had to leave the continent. The art historian Frederick Antal was one of them. His social historical method was very influential for Berger's way of thinking.[5] Antal's book about Florentine painting and its social historical background seemed to him to be a good example of a social history of art. Another important friend and intellectual example was the Austrian communist, author and publicist Ernst Fischer. Fischer had fled from the National Socialists to Moscow. After the war, he represented the Communist Party in parliament. His book, *The Necessity of Art*, published in London in 1963, exerted a great influence on Berger because it treated similar questions to those Berger was thinking about. One problem was the connection between form and content, another the definition of naturalism and realism.

When Berger and Fischer met for the first time in 1961, Berger had already written the article "Problems of Socialist Art" for the magazine *Labour Monthly*. Here, one finds many of the themes and considerations the author was dealing with later on in his books and films. These included questions such as how people (in the 1960s) viewed the art produced in or around Par-

3 John Berger, *Mit Hoffnung zwischen den Zähnen* (Berlin: Wagenbach, 2008), 109.

4 "In the global struggle for power and nuclear purity I held the Moscow line, but in relation to Moscow policy towards art and thought I was always opposed"; Berger quoted by Lewis Jones. "Portrait of the Artist as a 'Wild Old Man,'" The Telegraph, 23 July 2001, http://www.telegraph.co.uk./culture/4724662/Portrait-of-the-artist-as-a-wild-old-man.html.

5 John A. Walker, *Arts TV: A History of Arts Television in Britain* (New Barnet: John Libbey, 1993), 93.

is between 1870 and 1920, and whether anyone had fully worked out how the social function of painting had been changed by the inventions and developments of other media.[6]

Fischer, who had a large extended network, was helpful to Berger in other respects as well. He arranged the contact with the publisher Erhard Frommhold of the Dresdner Verlag der Kunst. Frommhold became Berger's first publisher. He printed Berger's text about the Italian painter Renato Guttuso in 1957.[7] Before Berger published a book in his native country, he issued his first publication in the GDR in a language he did not speak. But the Guttuso book was to Berger's advantage because it made him better known in Russian circles. This fact and the short political thaw, during which the USSR found a more open attitude to aesthetic questions, made it possible for Berger to be invited to write an essay on Fernand Léger by an editor of a Muscovian art magazine. Like the Italian painter, Léger was also a communist, but until then his paintings had been rejected as "decadent art" by the Soviet Union. The collaboration with the Russians henceforth made it easier for Berger to get a visa.

Berger was originally a painter who had studied art in London. He started his career in the late 1940s and exhibited quite successfully at the time. Besides painting he taught drawing and worked as an art critic. He promoted a socially engaged realism like that of the painters of the Kitchen Sink School in Great Britain.[8] Since his work as a critic took up too much time, Berger gave up painting and concentrated on writing. In 1956, he decided to start a career as a novelist. Two years later his first novel, *A Painter of Our Time*, was released.[9]

Berger was of the opinion that art and culture were weapons in the fight

6 Geoff Dyer, *Ways of Telling: The Work of John Berger* (London: Pluto Press, 1986), 31.

7 John Berger, *Renato Guttuso* (Dresden: Verlag der Kunst 1957); Ebert Hildtrud, *Erhard Frommhold (1928–2007). Lektor und Publizist. "Meine Biographie sind die Bücher"* (Berlin: Archiv-Blätter, 2008).

8 Dyer, *Ways of Telling*, 3–28; James Hyman, *The Battle for Realism: Figurative Art in Britain during the Cold War, 1945–1960* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001); Brendan Prendeville, *Realism in 20th Century Painting* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2001), 146–47; Robin Spencer, "Brit Art from the Fifties: The Reality versus the Myth," 10 May 2002, http://www.studiointernational.com/index.php/brit-art-from-the-fifties-the-reality-versus-the-myth.

9 Gordon Johnston, "Writing and Publishing the Cold War: John Berger and Secker & Warburg," in *Twentieth Century British History* 12:4 (2001): 432–60. Dyer, *Ways of Telling*, 34–44.

for a different society. To him, realist art alone seemed to be the appropriate method to achieve the new conditions. He favored an art that took the side of socialist ideas and made a contribution to changing the social conscience. In his eyes, Guttuso was the embodiment of a successful artist and political activist. His art was like a Marxist art theory put into practice. Berger's definition of realism was:

> Realism is the declared enemy of all academism. Realism in art comes into being when the artist discovers and interprets the changing reality of the world. Realism is the art of the probable and it can only be created by those whose world view enables them to work in such a way that the probable becomes the real. However, the academic in art comes into being if the artist tries to pick a single perception out of the reality and make it static, be it a historical or a purely subjective phenomenon. It is the art not of the probable but of the accidental and it is created by those who fear the probable world.[10]

Berger was obliged to the USSR in solidarity until the beginning of the 1960s. Then his attitude became more critical. He had had reservations about Russian art even earlier. In his third and last article, "Soviet Aesthetics"—which was already written after his first journey to the Soviet Union in 1952—he praised the creation of a real tradition while Western society was only destroying its traditions: "A true tradition can only be built on the general awareness that art should be an inspiration to life—not a consolation."[11] But in spite of all the admiration, his verdict was negative: "The majority of Russian painting is bad [and] the new developments are embryonic."[12] Berger supported the development of a European social and socialist realism in a clear dissociation. The ideological splits—a result of the ambivalent relationship to the Soviet Union—were also to remain characteristic of his later relationship to this country.

Berger focused his interests not only on contemporary art but also on classical modern and old art. He made films for British television about Belli-

10 Berger, *Art and Revolution*, 27.
11 Berger quoted in Hyman, *The Battle for Realism*, 67.
12 Ibid.

ni, as well as about Léger and the French outsider artist and postman Ferdinand Cheval. The film on Cheval in particular illustrates Berger's endeavor to exceed the canon of the great artists. This attitude was most evident in the film *An Artist from Moscow*, broadcast in 1969 by the BBC.[13] In the year in which *Art and Revolution* was published, Berger even produced a film about his Russian friend. On reflection, it was a small media campaign with the aim of pushing Neizvestny's fame in the West.

Ernst Neizvestny was born in Sverdlovsk in the Ural Mountains in 1925. His family had Jewish roots. As a highly talented child, he was sent to the Repin Academy of Arts. He fought for the Red Army from 1943 to 1945 and just before the end of the war he was so heavily wounded that he was declared dead and awarded the Red Star medal posthumously. But miraculously, he managed to survive and continued his artist's career, studying sculpture and philosophy in Moscow from 1947 to 1954.

His early work met with official approval. He received a nomination for the Stalin Prize in 1954. But despite these successes, Neizvestny was very unsatisfied. He disliked the repressive atmosphere of the university and the poor teaching conditions. In philosophy, there were no primary literature or primary sources of the classical writers.

> We would learn about Lenin from Stalin, about Marx from Lenin and Stalin. . . . Little old men would insist that we take an active part in political disputes between factions and sub-factions at various party congresses dating back forty years. And we had to memorize them like the Talmud. It was monstrously uninteresting work.[14]

This was why Neizvestny joined a secret study group that was reading prohibited books. He familiarized himself with the art created before the Russian revolution in 1917 and with the disgraced avant-garde of the 1920s. Modeling sculptures in the way of constructivism and exhibiting them caused him trouble. His examples were the work of Malevich and Tatlin. Neizvest-

13 *An Artist from Moscow*. Program number: LMA 5172E. Date: 22 April 1969. Length: 0:47:15.

14 Neizvestny quoted in Albert Leong, *Centaur: The Life and Art of Ernst Neizvestny* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 74.

Figure 3.1.
Jean Mohr, *L'atelier de Neizvestny,* Moscou, 1966.
© Jean Mohr, Musée de l'Elysée, Lausanne.

ny chose a dangerous path that was to lead him into permanent conflict with the official guards of the Soviet arts.

One of the results was that the artists' union refused him a proper studio; instead, he had to work in a very small former shop. Photographs in *Art and Revolution* show a workshop full to bursting point, where the sculptor suffered in the cramped conditions and creative work was almost impossible. But Neizvestny did not give up and he fought for his views in public. This was why he was appreciated by certain circles. Poets, for example, praised him in their lyrics. But the traditionalists made sure that he very rarely got the chance to succeed—for instance, in 1960, when he won a national competition for a victory monument of the Second World War. This time it was not the guards but a jury of high-ranking soldiers who delivered the judgment. In comparison, the Soviet cultural establishment missed no opportunity to put the nonconformist sculptor in his place. The opportunity to destroy him came in 1962. Neizvestny took part in the first Muscovian exhibition of abstract art. It was demanded that Khrushchev close it immediately, but the head of government wanted first to form his own opinion of the disputed show. On his visit he was confronted by Neizvestny. The sculptor made him listen to his unorthodox views. It became a legendary meeting. Khrushchev was impressed by the courage of the artist. But the consequences of Neizvestny's appearance were so severe that, for the next ten years, it was nearly impossible for him to hold down his job.

> I managed to publish my illustrations to Dostoyevsky and erect sculptures in Riga and the Crimea, but these sculptures were commissioned before 1962, and it was simple to cast them in stone and metal. I was unable to sell a thing under my own name during those ten years. But as a stonemason, bricklayer or sculptor's assistant, I was able to earn quite a bit, since my colleagues turned to me for help and paid me good money. When there was no work I would load salt at the Trifonow railway station… As a sculptor, I have blossomed only in the last three years, from 1972 to 1975, after winning an international competition for a monument at the Aswan Dam in Egypt.[15]

15 Ibid., 163.

The aim of the state repressions was clear. The sculptor was to be isolated and eliminated. Given this hopeless situation, the only option that remained for Neizvestny was to emigrate to the West. But since it was not easy to obtain an exit visa, Neizvestny wanted to put pressure on the public authorities by making his fate well known in the West. Berger was to help him. Thus, the idea of *Art and Revolution* arose.[16]

The subject of sculpture was untypical for Berger; he had spoken about it only sporadically. He devoted some critical articles to his fellow countryman Henry Moore in the *New Statesman*, in which he reproached the British sculptor for the "retrogression" of his sculptures. In contrast, Berger found in Neizvestny's realistic sculptures the "antithesis" to Moore. The unusual book title, *Art and Revolution*—which places Neizvestny's plastic art under a main theme—can be read to mean that, in comparison to the world-famous Moore, the unknown Russian sculptor was the true revolutionary who had the ability to develop art further.

Berger wanted to reach as many people as possible with his articles, books and films. *Art and Revolution* was also dedicated to a wider audience. Consequently, the book differed from traditional artist biographies of its time as it included a historical and ideological analysis of Russian art and an analysis of global political affairs. Berger dissected the reasons for Neizvestny being branded a "dissident," despite the fact that he was not a political opponent of the Soviet system and did not want to be one: "But essentially Neizvestny is not a rebel. And that is why he is such a threat and his example so original."[17] In the second part of his book, Berger provides an insight into the sculptures and drawings by the artist and tries to give a description of the artistic development from the mid-1950s until the late 1960s. Beyond this, his study attempts to give an outline of Russian art history. Berger reflects on the relation-

16 I interviewed John Berger and Anna Neizvestny and I got two different versions. The version I present here is Berger's, narrated in a long telephone call on 8 April 2009. Anna Neizvestny, Ernst Neizvestny's second wife whom he got to know in New York, told me that Ernst is of the opinion that the story told here could be one possible explanation for writing the book, that is to say, it is Berger's view of things. Neizvestny himself could not give me a written depiction of his own version because he was too ill. It was only possible to talk to his wife Anna, who tried to answer my questions as thoroughly as possible. With some reservations, I recount Berger's version here because it enables me to lean on details. In the case of Neizvestny's view, I have no details at my disposal.

17 Berger, *Art and Revolution*, 79.

ship between realism and naturalism using the development and meaning of the art academies in Europe and Russia. He tries to prove that in Russia there was no realism opposed to academism. France and the art of Gustave Courbet had not been present. The standards inaugurated by the Russian academy had not been challenged and this had later been momentous for the visual arts during Stalin's rule. Due to the doctrine of socialism in one country and the development of Stalinist society, the new artistic freedoms won if the successful revolution had been abandoned. Instead of a realism that could have reflected social reality in all its antagonisms and in its totality, the leadership had promoted a naturalism that remained superficial. The consequence had been the failure of the development of a Marxist aesthetic in the Soviet Union. Berger came to the opinion that there never had been any true realist tendencies in Russia. He went as far as to maintain that even Russian painting in the nineteenth century, which seemed to be socially critical, had not actually been realism because it had only chosen different themes but had maintained the means of naturalist painting. Hence, it had not differed fundamentally from academic painting. The socialist realism of the twentieth century was not an exception because it represented nothing more than the victory of a naturalism extraction over the revolutionary avant-garde tendencies. Berger's conclusion was that the "new" art of Soviet society was nothing more than the old academism. The latter was merely sailing under a new flag.

It was clear to Berger that even after Stalin's death, the visual arts were still under the centralized control of the academy of fine arts and the union of artists. Therefore, Neizvestny had to be the opponent of both institutions. They pushed him into illegality by refusing him access to a foundry, to iron and bronze, and by forcing him to obtain the materials on the black market as well as scrapyards. It was inevitable that Neizvestny would appear to be a "dissident" and a "progressive" artist from a Western perspective. But the evaluation of his art's historical meaning was not as easy as that in view of his young age and his modest output.

Parallels with contemporary Western art were missing. Compared with Western art, Neizvestny's work seemed to be antiquated and like the testimonials of a finished episode that had been influenced by the Russian avant-garde. But in terms of content, Berger perceived in Neizvestny's sculptures an unbroken and strong humanism, which was forward-looking for him and

Figure 3.2.
Jean Mohr, *"Le suicide", sculpture de Neizvestny,* Moscou, 1966.
© Jean Mohr, Musée de l'Elysée, Lausanne.

expressed an artistic struggle with existential human conditions. Berger believed he would recognize in Neizvestny's work the realist, too, because it was possible to draw parallels from their intensive thinking about the theme of human stamina and resistance to the worldwide liberation movements of the 1960s.[18] In an article for the *Daily Worker*, Berger put Neizvestny in order of a worldwide tradition of socialist art, which invents realist forms for socialist contents.[19] This argumentation was developed further in *Art and Revolution*, in which Berger writes that Neizvestny was a "Marxist" artist who made human perseverance and standing power—which is sometimes tragic and sometimes affirmative and heroic—the subject of his art. Here the monograph has features of a political paper. Berger connected the artist and his work to the anti-imperialistic struggle. The sculptor, who is fighting for the freedom of the individual, is with his resistance in the middle.

Before Neizvestny was allowed to leave his country in 1976, the authorities demanded that he distance himself from Berger's book. Only then would they grant him the exit visa.[20] To commit this "betrayal" would be less difficult for him with the knowledge that it would have been the last humiliation by the state. Neizvestny settled in the United States after stopovers in Vienna and Geneva in 1977. The book was to be useful for him there as its author had become famous in the 1970s. So when the Russian émigré Neizvestny arrived in New York, he had the rare luck to have a monograph about his art written in English by an important English author. Moreover, this monograph gives him in certain respects the aura of a "dissident." This was helpful during the Cold War years. In Great Britain, France and the United States, the book was given a warm-hearted reception. Therefore, it definitely supported the artist by giving him a second career on the new continent and making a name for him there.

18 Berger, *Art and Revolution*, 152.

19 John Berger, "A Revelation from Russia," *The Observer Weekend Review*, 28 January 1962; John Berger, "A Modern Mind at Work," *Daily Worker*, 10 March 1962; quoted here in Leong, *Centaur*, 121.

20 John Berger, interview by Kai Artinger, April 2009.

4

Pop Art in the GDR: Willy Wolff's Dialogue with the West

Sigrid Hofer

Willy Wolff, a student of Dix, member of the ASSO, former anarchist[1] and early communist (he joined the KPD/Communist Party of Germany in 1929[2]) was firm in his belief that there was no alternative to a socialist society. Although he did not question the political goal, he did take a critical stance on the party and its directives, particularly in regard to the visual arts. He found it impossible to acknowledge aesthetic judgments made by an office; he did not allow himself to be used for politico-cultural purposes; he refused public commissions such as the opportunity in the second half of the 1960s to paint the foyer of the television tower at Alexanderplatz with popular motifs.[3] He followed his own artistic ideas without compromising. As happened with many of his colleagues, this gave rise to a prohibition against exhibiting; in 1968, for example, an exhibition in the Galerie Kunst unserer

1 A volume of poetry and prose by Erich Mühsam was on his work table; Max Stirner (1806–1856) was one of his favorite writers.

2 Liane Burckhardt, "Willy Wolff," *Kunstchronik* 54:4 (2001): 172.

3 The construction of the television tower began in 1965.

Zeit (Gallery for Contemporary Art) in Dresden had to be cancelled shortly before the opening on order of the authorities.[4]

Over the years Wolff developed a markedly diverse œuvre, outside the official art scene, producing drawings with bizarre and surrealistic echoes; oils which led, in his confrontation with the work of Poliakoff, to Hard-edge painting; drawings that can be linked to Naum Gabo; abstract cylinder prints; and composite media collages and assemblages made by using banal, everyday objects and items he found.

Integrated into the Dresden artists' circle around the Kupferstich-Kabinett (Prints and Drawings Collection), the Kühl art gallery and the collector Ursula Baring—all of whom supported nonconformist spirits—Willy Wolff was by no means an exception in regard to the diversity of his works in both content and form. The artistic climate of Dresden was characterized in particular by an output of nonconformist pictures, reflected well into the 1970s primarily by constructivist and abstract compositions. A discernible counterculture developed there, inspired by a lively exchange among artists and by the possibility of reaching a limited public through privately organized exhibitions.

Abstract painting, for instance, was part of this counterculture; it emerged as an independent development in the East and not as a belated plagiarism of the Western avant-garde. Whereas Art Informel was largely based on the abstraction of the prewar era and therefore developed at approximately the same time in the West and the East, it appears that direct stimulation from the West was the source of the version of Pop Art found in the East. Willy Wolff is still considered the master of Pop Art in the GDR as well as its major representative.

The following essay explores the question of how themes and stylistic means that were genuinely connected to the phenomena of the capitalist economic system could find their way into art produced under socialist conditions. At the end of the 1950s, an incursion of representational art had displaced the dominant psychic automatism; with this the reality of mass media and mass culture had become the background reflected by Pop Art. Where,

4 See Hans-Ulrich Lehmann, "Symbolische Bedeutung des Sichtbaren," in *Willy Wolff zum Hundertsten*, ed. S. Walther and G. Porstmann (Dresden: Städtische Galerie, Kunstsammlung, 2006), 19. Illustration of the invitation poster: 15.

in this context, did Willy Wolff wish to anchor his own notion of reality? In pursuit of an answer, the first section of this essay will examine the influence of Pop Art on Willy Wolff's work, and the second section will treat Wolff's response to socialist realism.

Willy Wolff owed his knowledge and creative transformation of Pop Art to two trips abroad at the end of the 1950s—on this point the secondary literature is in agreement. These trips added to the expressive quality of his repertoire.

In 1957 Willy Wolff traveled for the first time to London and Derby with his wife Annemarie, also an artist who designed tapestries and fabric appliqué.[5] The trip was possible because Annemarie Balden-Wolff, who had emigrated in 1933, was an acknowledged victim of fascist persecution. An initial request for a trip had been refused by the GDR authorities, but an official invitation from the Communist Party of England to both Wolffs—Annemarie was still a member of the party there—was finally granted.[6]

It is no longer possible to reconstruct the trip, so we do not know which artist colleagues the Wolffs met. In unpublished autobiographical notes, Willy Wolff reports on numerous visits to the Tate and other galleries in the city, without going into details, however.[7] It would have been too late for him to see the exhibit curated by Richard Hamilton in 1956 at the London Whitechapel Art Gallery, "This Is Tomorrow" by the Independent Group,[8] which heralded the beginning of English Pop Art and is considered one of the most influential exhibitions of the 1950s in England; it can be assumed, however, that he came across the work of these artists in the galleries. The stimulation provided by the first trip must have been profound because the artist couple returned to England the following year, remaining again for thirty days.[9]

The confrontation with such a different lifestyle—according to the tenor of research—led Wolff to completely new pictorial concepts in the following years, although it was not until the mid-1960s that these were to become determinant in his work; the reasons for this will be examined at a later point.

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5 Lothar Lang, "Versuch Willy Wolff gerecht zu werden," in *Willy Wolff. Malerei, Plastik, Zeichnungen, Monotypien* (Leipzig: Staatlicher Kunsthandel der DDR, 1980), 7–9.

6 Pan Wolff in a conversation with Sigrid Hofer on 21 September 2009 in Berlin.

7 Manuscript in the Pan Wolff estate, Berlin.

8 Founded by Hamilton and other artists.

9 Pan Wolff in a conversation with Sigrid Hofer on 21 September 2009 in Berlin.

The first collages in which Wolff used colored paper, illustrations from magazines and colored packing materials, as well as fragments of his own work as resources for his compositions date from around 1965; he would later transform these compositions, some of which were very small, into large-scale oil paintings. In an untitled piece from 1965, Willy Wolff combined motifs revolving around femininity and eroticism. A bra, stylized breasts—depicted once frontally and then lined up in a series—and a female torso set off by tomato-red stockings are arranged on the paper together with fabric samples. The artist's attention was mainly directed to the fabric, which veils and covers the object but at the same time makes it the focus. The bloom of a red rose seems to make it clear that femininity has a positive connotation here.

Femininity and the cult of clothing appear repeatedly in Willy Wolff's work. The collage *Grünes Ei und Wäsche* (Green egg and lingerie), also dating from c. 1965, again shows a bra; this time, however, there is an erotic charge coming from the model's corporeality. The dynamic perspective of the almost dazzling white underwear and the formal directing of the gaze toward the green egg link the two motifs in an ironically ambiguous manner. The handling of the motifs in these collages—the recourse to everyday objects and a focus on eroticism in the same way as it was used by the advertising industry—reinforces their proximity to Pop Art, as do the intense colors and the renunciation of the artist's individual hand.

Moreover, works such as *Ein Bad kann himmlisch sein/Die Mischbatterie* (A bath can be heavenly/mixer tap; Plate 4.1),[10] or *Warnung* (Warning) also seem to be possible only in reference to Pop Art. In *Warnung* from 1967, a car tire dominates the center of the picture, as if it were raised onto a pedestal. In the excerpt-like depiction and the finely detailed execution, the tire is treated like a prized object, one that, moreover is quite new and without any trace of use. The view from below to the hubcap, the stylized depiction of the spokes, the reflections in the chrome, and the detailed treatment of the tire tread reveal the artist's graphic perception of the object, which celebrates the banal tire like a work of art, like a sculpture.

Roy Lichtenstein, in contrast, filled the picture space with his automobile tires as in an advertisement, concentrating the observer's attention on only

10 See Dietulf Sander, "Willy Wolff. Ein Bad kann himmlisch sein," *Information. Museum der Bildenden Künste Leipzig* 1 (1982): 4–6.

the one object. The tire tread, however, was understood as a repeating pattern, which in its obvious simplification invoked paintings of geometric abstraction.[11] This play with art history and the ironic commentary on the outmoded gestural or intellectual hand of the individual artist, which was characteristic of the 1950s, was among the instruments with which Lichtenstein and others accompanied their aesthetic upgrading of the world of consumption. In 1961 Lichtenstein's tennis shoes (*Keds*) reflected Vasarely's picture *Mizzar* (around 1956–1960), and with his *Sturmfenster* (storm window) Andy Warhol had also made reference to color field painting.

Willy Wolff countered the single motif—the strategy followed by advertising—with a more extensive pictorial narrative. His tire is not detached from the context of its use, and the observer's ability to make associations is challenged by the barely introduced form of a bridge, by the green foreground and not least by the title *Warnung*. Nonetheless, in his objective depiction Wolff resists any interpretive intent. What kind of warning the tire should evoke is undetermined; is it a warning of the basic danger of driving a car, is it a warning against ruining the landscape through the continued construction of roads, is it a warning that the automobile fundamentally changes the course of life? The mixer tap also remains enigmatic. Although it dominates the surface, its existence is strangely unreal. Partly backed by substantial-seeming tiles, partly illuminating from an immaterial space with clouds, the tap may be meant as an ironic commentary or, just as likely, as a depiction of an ideal or an illusion. Reading the painting as a reference to shortages in the GDR's economy, which turned tiles and taps into desirable consumer objects,[12] does not, in my opinion, do justice to the context—but more about that later.

Pop Art had expanded the concept of art through a rigorous introduction of the trivial, together with an emphasis on the aesthetic qualities of the trivial; it had shown that the world of consumption and the mass media not only dominated people's lifestyles but were also able to stimulate the artistic eye to

11 See K. Varnedoe and A. Gopnik, eds., *High and Low: Modern Art and Popular Culture* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1990).

12 See Eugen Blume, "Die späten Bilder von Willy Wolff," in *Willy Wolff zum Hundertsten*, ed. S. Walther and G. Porstmann (Dresden: Städtische Galerie, Kunstsammlung, 2006), 7–12.

the same degree as the highest achievements of cultural history. Nonetheless, Wolff's stock of motifs for his compositions seems to be based predominantly on personal experiences. The picture of the tap was occasioned by the housing authority's decision to replace the fixtures in his building.

The motive behind the painting *Terese von K.* was a hike from Dresden to Vienna. Whereas *Mischbatterie* responded to a contemporary event, in *Terese von K.* Wolff treated an episode from his youth. As recorded in his autobiographical notes,[13] on this hike, which took place before the Second World War, he went through the town of Konnersreuth (*K* thus stands for Konnersreuth, which is located between the Fichtel Mountains and the Pfälzer Forest), an important place of popular piety. Therese Neumann (1898–1962), who manifested stigmata on Good Fridays in particular, was venerated there. Wolff's receptiveness to mystical accounts of this type may have been connected to his spiritual tendencies. There is documentation that he had read not only the Ashtavakra Gita, an Indian Sanskrit text which records the dialogue of King Janaka with the sage Ashtavakra and treats the path to happiness,[14] but also that he may have known the accounts of Paramahansa Yogananda (an Indian yogi, philosopher and writer), who wrote about his visit to Therese Neumann on 16 July 1935 in his *Autobiography of a Yogi*. And not least Willy Wolff's friend Erich Mühsam had memorialized this legendary figure in his poem *Die Resel von Konnersreuth*. Wolff explicitly mentions Mühsam's poetry in his autobiography. Years later Wolff encountered modern steam-driven machines while hiking, a custom he had retained from his *Wandervogel* days. The many hoses and tubes of these machines had inspired him to connect them with his earlier experience, bringing them together artistically in a bizarre manner.

Linked more to personal impressions than to autobiographical experiences is the painting *Artistenbein (Redam)* (Acrobat's leg). In 1968 at documenta 4, Claes Oldenburg had exhibited his two-part synthetic sculpture *London Knees 1966*, a play on the length of the new miniskirts. In the course of the 1960s this skirt, coming from the English fashion industry, had shrunk to the format of a wide belt; it heralded the new self-confidence of the emancipated woman, who had freed herself from social conventions and displayed her

13 See manuscript in the Pan Wolff estate, Berlin.
14 Ibid.

body in a flippant–provocative manner unknown before that time. Leading on the one hand to storms of indignation over immoral behavior, on the other hand it had advanced to a code of behavior for youth culture. Oldenburg ennobled this object of social irritation and voyeuristic desire and confronted the observer with things that obviously affected the public more than the canonized traditional cultural goods.

Wolff's work, on the other hand, was based on what was known as the *Goldener Mann* (Golden man) on the tower of Dresden's city hall.[15] Ewald Redam from Meissen, Saxon's heavyweight and *Achtkampf* competition champion in 1907, and later founder of a variety show, served as a model for painters and sculptors at the Dresden Academy of Art, among others. His virile stature was also sought when Dresden's patron saint, Hercules (emptying the cornucopia over the city), was to be erected. The sight of Redam's muscular leg inspired Willy Wolff's parody, which reduced the heavyweight body to the engaged leg and provided him with a fancy boot that played on the acrobatics of variety theater. Whereas Oldenburg increased the provocation emanating from his motif by equating the legs as anonymous fetishes to desire per se, Wolff did not emphasize the erotic but rather the acrobatic moment. What could slip into voyeurism with Oldenburg, Wolff connected back to the sphere of artistic entertainment.[16]

Tom Wesselmann's *Seascape* from 1966, with a woman's leg as the basic motif, was also geared toward pure eroticism, to the anticipation of sexuality; his *Great American Nude* series (ending in 1973) was reduced more and more to the presentation of body parts and, according to Roland Barthes, came close to the observer's need to act out his lust for looking without fear. Moreover, Wesselmann reported that in these paintings he was seeking metaphors for intimate experiences with his friend and later wife, Claire Selley.[17] In contrast to these comparable works, for Wolff the erotic moment did not play a role; nor was it allowed to claim a place in GDR society. According to Erich

15 Pan Wolff in a conversation with Sigrid Hofer on 21 September 2009 in Berlin. The commission for the *Golden Man* went to the painter and sculptor Richard Guhr in 1907.

16 For Wesselmann it was also a matter of representing the erotic, of the "new sexual openness" at the beginning of the 1960s. See Marco Livingstone, "Telling It Like It Is," in *Tom Wesselmann, 1959–1993*, ed. T. Buchstiener and O. Letze (Ostfildern: Cantz, 1994), 17.

17 See Livingstone, "Telling It Like It Is," and Jo-Anne Birnie Danzker, "The Great American Nude," in *Tom Wesselmann, 1959–1993*, ed. T. Buchstiener and O. Letze (Ostfildern: Cantz, 1994), 226.

Honecker's official statements in 1965, "ethics and morals" and "decency and propriety" are "unshakable standards" to be distinguished from the "immorality" of the enemy system.[18]

Altogether, Willy Wolff's erotic motifs are far from the lustful display (scopophilia) of the nudes disseminated by the mass media in daily newspapers and journals, to which Pop Art responded with conscious ambiguity. In contrast to the images spread by the media, Pop Art guided the observer's view to individual parts of the body. The entire figure was not the subject of attention, but rather the seductive eyes, the kissable mouth, the attractive breasts, which were all disproportionately enhanced and could have an oppressive effect. On the other hand, the erotic motifs were withdrawn from the observer precisely by means of this pictorial strategy. Captured in two-dimensionality and stylized into an artificial figure, they surrender any pretence of vitality and individuality. In addition, the grid on the picture surface underscored the artificial character of the body fragments and decidedly countered the temptations emanating from them.

It is no accident that in addition to the bra, Willy Wolff treated classical sculpture in his work *Antiker Torso* (Antique torso). His artistic view of the female body was guided by a long-established ideal of beauty, which made reference to the torso on the one hand and to depictions from the Renaissance on the other hand. At the same time, he countermanded the reduction of femininity to an emanation of sexual appeal because his erotic motifs were sanctioned by cultural history, and, as with the bra or in the work *Allegorisch* (Allegorical), which altered a female figure by Cranach and confronted her with a hammer and sickle, were updated through an ironic twist.

Important differences between Pop Art's intentions and Willy Wolff's work are to be noted not only regarding the choice and understanding of motifs, but also in the artistic execution. Whereas Pop Art used the trivial subject as provocation and to stimulate critical discussion, it was precisely their everyday character that these subjects forfeited under Wolff's treatment of them. Lichtenstein had reflected the techniques of mass media with his dots, David Hockney loved the clumsy, nonacademic application of paint, in his

18 See Wolfgang Engler, "Strafgericht der Moderne. Das 11. Plenum im historischen Rückblick," in *Kahlschlag. Das 11. Plenum des ZK der SED 1965. Studien und Dokumente.*, ed. Günter Adge (Berlin: Aufbau Taschenbuch Verlag, 2000), 19.

assemblages Rauschenberg carried traditional principles of composition ad absurdum; in contrast, Wolff opted for meticulous, calculated execution. In general, his oil paintings were preceded by collages, which served the preparation, study and development of his pictorial idea.[19]

This is evident, for example, in the fact that the paper materials he used were not glued on in their final proportions but rather represented larger sections that could be shifted around until the formal goal was achieved. These "designs" were transferred to oils with only minor changes. Thus, in *Antiker Torso* Wolff retained the tear and the fold, which ran vertically through the black paper as a design element even when the image was transferred to canvas.[20] In addition, handwritten notes on these designs or "drafts" described the gradations of color to be applied, in case the paper used did not correspond with Wolff's vision. Pencil-drawn grids, moreover, document the intended process of transfer to a larger format.[21] Notes on the back, in which Willy Wolff recorded the owner of the analogous oil painting, also indicate the direct connection between design and execution.[22]

The meticulous detailing that generally characterized Wolff's drawings thus turned up again in his artistic input in the collages: he balanced things exactly, subtly determined the color fields, and laid down the proportions. Skilled manual refinement always remained determinant; an interest in form and the process of analyzing the image characterized his entire œuvre. Thus, his work never goes after the effect, is never intended for the quick impact, even if the color-intense version—before the background of the regulated sale of painting materials in the GDR—must have had a particular fascination. As the quality of the paper—construction paper, colored foil, packing materials—shows, these were generally products from the West.

Although a frequent change of style was characteristic of Willy Wolff, nonetheless over the years his practices for depicting images were continu-

19 Blume already pointed out that the collages are not to be seen as independent works. Blume, "Die späten Bilder von Willy Wolff," 7.

20 The collage to *Antiker Torso* in the Saxon State and University Library Dresden (SLUB) Mscr. Dresd. App. 2717, 52.

21 Compare, for example, the collage *Toscana* in the SLUB Mscr. Dresd. App. 2717, 69.

22 See the collection in the SLUB. All of the collages have a note on the back recording the owner of the relevant work in oil.

ously marked by the firm precision of his draftsmanship (*Nadelparade/Parade of Needles* or *Knöpfe/Buttons*). His training as a cabinetmaker and his appreciation of handicraft skills—reflected in the scrupulous neatness of his atelier and on his workbench[23]—as well as the academic training in drawing he received from Richard Müller at the Kunstakademie in Dresden determined his manner of depicting the objects over the years. Attention has been drawn repeatedly to the extremely sharp naturalism of his reed pen works, to his accuracy of observation, and to the concern with fine nuances, which took precedence over a display of the individuality of his own hand. The artist's gesture as evidence of the creative process and as the expression of an inner composure or an expressive argument were unimportant to Wolff. Only in a brief phase of experimentation with abstract forms in the mid-1960s (Poliakoff and cylinder prints) were spontaneity and accident allowed to express themselves, although they were yoked into predetermined, clearly proportioned arrangements of the picture surface.[24] Thus, Willy Wolff developed and controlled his collages and oil paintings with the same exactness with which he executed the series of his parade pictures.

Based on such artistic premises, under Willy Wolff's hand the depiction of a mixer faucet is transformed into a sumptuous study of color. The appliance, reproduced in faithful detail down to the reflections of light on the chrome surfaces and placed in the middle of the picture with almost monumental obtrusiveness, is set off from the background, which through finest gradations of blue-gray values creates a subtle painterly transition from the hard structure of the tiles to the filmy cloud formations. In such works Wolff insisted that the artistic character of a picture was not only to be defined by the ideal value it was supposed to convey, but also by the masterly treatment of conventional design methods.

The finely detailed treatment of the motifs thus throws light on Wolff's specific grasp of Pop Art. Through the decidedly artistic treatment of the picture subject he completely neutralized the difference between high and low. Whereas Pop Art had made the ambivalent relation between high and low its

23 Dr. Joachim Menzhausen in a conversation with Sigrid Hofer on 29 September 2009 in Dresden.

24 Even the cylinder prints of the later years do not give evidence of a transition to abstract concepts, but rather reflect the beginning of Parkinson's disease. I am indebted to Dr. Menzhausen for this information given in the same occurrence.

theme (for instance, where Vasarely's structures turned up again as the pattern of shoe soles), Wolff ennobled all pictorial motifs by giving them the same painterly care as was given to significant picture subjects. This was his way of transforming simple, everyday products into art.

This intent is also reflected in the fact that Wolff—at least in regard to his collages and oils—aspired to the unicum. Since his asking prices were moderate, there was no reason for him to introduce a broader circle of the population to art by means of graphic reproductions, as was the case with Western Pop Art, which also used this approach to take a stand on what was happening on the art market.

If the incorporation of fragments from the real world in his work only shows superficial parallels to Pop Art, the question arises as to why Wolff made use—even if only in a limited way—of such stylistic means. In my opinion, Willy Wolff's works are to be read in part (not exclusively!) as a subtle commentary on officially imposed art practices in the GDR.

The years in which Wolff devoted himself to Pop Art were characterized by tough politico-cultural discourses, with vehement efforts going into establishing a socialist national culture. The goal of the second Bitterfeld Conference in 1964 was to shape the socialist personality and the socialist consciousness in a lasting manner,[25] with artists participating more strongly in this task. The Eleventh plenum of the Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany/Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (SED), meeting from 16–18 December 1965 to handle questions of culture, was, according to Wolfgang Engler, a "perfectly staged tribunal" which mercilessly settled accounts with all the "progressive tendencies in the arts and in intellectual life altogether," frightened the "protagonists of East German modernism and their allies in the cultural offices for many years" to come, and banished "unvarnished reality from public discourse."[26] In a particularly perfidious charge, intellectuals and young criminals were seen to have affinities, and the artists were made to share responsibility for

25 The First Bitterfeld Conference took place on 24 April 1959, the Second Bitterfeld Conference on 24–25 April 1964. In April 1967 the Bitterfeld Path was to be activated once again at the Seventh Party Conference of the SED. The goal of the program was to support and form the socialist personality through participation in the production of art. See G. Feist and E. Gillen, *Kunstkombinat der DDR* (Berlin: Nishen, 1990), 68.

26 Engler, "Strafgericht der Moderne," 17.

the existing state of things. The consequences of this "clean-sweep plenum" were dramatic, peaking in numerous prohibitions of plays, books and music groups.

Willy Wolff reacted to this politico-cultural climate by pitting his own personal view of reality against socialist realism. The question "What is reality?" was answered by the cultural functionaries within the context of a historical and a philosophical (*geschichtsphilosophisch*) approach, according to which art was always evidence of the temporary state of society's development. On the one hand, realism meant a naturalistic way of depiction, which was treated as a *conditio sine qua non* in regard to the working population's ability to comprehend it; on the other hand, the essence of realism was understood as an art which—according to Peter Pachnicke—"should make reality visually recognizable, move the imagination, and activate a change in reality."[27] Transferred to content, this led to the support of affirmative pictorial topics and to a narrative documentation of society's progress.

Willy Wolff confronted this reality, which had to comply with the dictated political will, with another reality that existed almost in parallel: the reality of the personal life experience. It was not surprising that the functionaries took offence at such individualistic designs by Wolff, since the interest of the individual was to be subordinate to the collective need. Moreover, the state and the party defined what popular art was to be, and this excluded as illegitimate a focus on everyday life with its very private experiences—which was what Wolff elevated to his pictorial theme.

Thus the recapturing of the world of objects—a central aspect of Pop Art—was not the starting point for Willy Wolff's aesthetic considerations; as a meticulous draftsman he had never become estranged from an object-oriented approach anyway. Rather, the new content of his pictures demanded a new vocabulary. Up until that point, Wolff's affinity for representational art had been expressed in surreal constructions; although these did possess critical potential, they were no longer suitable for his changed intentions. Now it was a matter of arguing on a level of reality that laid open the dialectic relation to socialist realism. Willy Wolff countered the declared socialist reality (in theme and style) with the reality of everyday life; he supplemented the

27 Peter Pachnicke, "Reaktion und Verweigerung. Beiträge zur Entwicklung der Kunst im Imperialismus seit den sechziger Jahren," *Bildende Kunst* 9 (1981): 422.

socialist mass culture, which had arisen from the influence of state and party on art production, through his individual perspective.

The enigmatic combinations of pictorial motifs in Willy Wolff's work have been emphasized again and again, and the artist himself also confirmed that he took a certain pleasure from bringing things that apparently did not belong together into resonance with one another. How these fragmentary slivers of life are to be interpreted, Willy Wolff did not explain. He left the observer free to follow his own associations. However, his refusal to give explicit answers can also be understood as a response to the party and the state, which unremittingly claimed sole authority for explaining reality and punished opposing points of view. Willy Wolff's standpoint, however, made it clear that one reality as such does not exist, that reality is merely formed in the head of every individual, and thus countless realities can coexist.

This standpoint ultimately also explains why Willy Wolff, who was very well informed about prevailing currents through the magazine *Kunstwerk* and his supply of English art literature,[28] did not take these up; op art, minimal art and similar movements must have been unimportant to him. His lifelong theme was confrontation with reality, and the means that guided him were verism, surrealism, and a specific form of realism whose pictorial strategy he owed to Pop Art.

28 Willy Wolff's library is preserved as an estate under Pan Wolff.

5

Twinkling Networks, Invisible Ties: On the Unofficial Contacts of Byelorussian Artists in the 1980s

Aliona Gloukhova

This article presents the first results of research on the unofficial contacts between Byelorussian artists and those from former USSR republics and from neighboring countries in the 1980s. In this period marked by perestroika, the contacts between USSR republics multiplied—indeed, official travel for the purpose of "sharing experiences" date from this very time. At the same time, unofficial art increased its visibility, something that was inspiring and frightening at the same time. The article will deal with Estonian and Polish lines of contacts, which could be seen as the example of the logic and tactics involved in the networks of the era.

This article does not pretend to be exhaustive or to decrypt all existing unofficial contacts, but it can be seen as the first step in gathering information about the period and analyzing the existing networking strategies: the entrance on the art market and in the "international" art context, the first residencies of Byelorussian artists in Poland, the practical issues of the transportation of canvases across borders and the acquisition of Byelorussian artists' works by collectors. We want to understand the tactics: How did artists establish professional contacts outside their country at a time when the art

field was controlled by the Union of Artists[1] and by exhibition committees (granting the right to some artists to be present in the public zone of visibility and excluding others)? Therefore, the issue of Byelorussian artists emigrating will not be analyzed here; instead, we will explore the unofficial practices of defining the space of liberty in the context of governmental regulation of the art field.

We think that there was a certain "implicit contract" (which obviously did not really exist) concerning the division between the *official* and the *unofficial*. The unofficial art of this time was not prohibited as such, but was displaced into the zone of silence and could only exist through apartment exhibitions, displays of work in basement ateliers and country house[2] performances. At the very moment it tried to enter the zone of visibility, it became problematic.[3] This implicit contract presupposed the abandonment of the right to talk publicly or to admit publicly the existence of another art, the main danger of which did not consist in political engagement but in the possibility of another existence. The avant-garde seemed to be frightful because of the very alternative to the discourse existing outside the official one.

The Certeau[4] distinction between tactics and strategies could be useful for us to realize the modes of functioning of the unofficial Byelorussian artists in times of socialist realism:

> I call a *strategy* the calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships that become possible as soon as a subject with will and power (a business, an army, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated. It postulates a *place* that can be delimited as its *own* and serve as the base from which relations with an *exteriority* composed of targets or threats . . . can be managed.[5]

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1 Artists' unions were created in the 1930s in the former USSR republics emboldening the Soviet artists and art historians to assure "socialistically" and ideologically correct art, asserting the patriotic values of "proletarian internationalism."

2 We have in mind the artistic tandem of Igor Kashkurevich and Ludmila Rusova, who realized their initiation in the contemporary art in their country house.

3 For instance, the first "public" exhibition of unofficial artists was organized in the 1980s in the open air close to the Svisloch River on the eve of the Minsk city celebration. Artists exhibited their canvases along the quay. The Ja. Kupaly Park close to the river was soon flooded by the police, policemen tried to throw the artists' works into the river and then began to "arrest the canvases," in order to transport them to the Yanka Kupala Museum, close to the area, which no one was allowed to enter.

4 M. Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 35.

5 Ibid., 36.

The power strategies are consequently functioning in the delimited space of visibility through the structured groups (unions), organized according to certain (bureaucratic) practices of five-year plans, reporting procedures, those of official authorization and other similar ones, which are reproduced. We can probably affirm that in the 1980s and earlier, the visible space of power was structured through the union of artists, the Commission of the Ministry of Culture giving permission to take the work of art out of the country and the routine exhibitions of official (visible) artists organized in the big exhibition halls.

Certeau continues: "In contrast to a strategy . . . a *tactic* is a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus. . . . The space of a tactic is the space of the other." And then later: "It operates in isolated actions, blow by blow. It takes advantage of 'opportunities' and depends on them."[6] Consequently, tactics, as the *art of the weak*, are not the planned actions of the resistance and consist of measurable actions representing the sort of reactions to the delimitation of liberty space by the power strategies: the twinkling networks, exhibitions in apartments and basements, several canvases transported on the same stretcher and others we will try to describe in this article. The difficulty of collecting materials concerning the unofficial contacts of Byelorussian artists of this time and making it readable consists in the fact that these networking tactics were meant to be invisible and unstructured, they were occasional and disseminated, fragmentally remembered and unsystematically reproduced by the main actors.

We should also denote a terminological problem. Several terms used by researchers, even those that are quite vague, attempt to describe the very confrontation of the art we are writing about with the official art (socialist realism). One of the terms is quite obvious—unofficial art. This term describes the antinomy official/unofficial. Official art, or socialist realism, was a priori the art supported by the government agencies, occupying the zone of visibility. Unofficial art in this case meant the art made by the artists who did not belong to the Artists' Union and existed in parallel to the official art field.

The confrontation of official and unofficial art did not mean the focus of the latter on political engagement or the promise of social engagement. On

6 Ibid., 37.

the contrary: in the Byelorussian case, unofficial art insistently pretended to be indifferent to politics, it was a case of persistent denial of all things political, which was present in the unofficial art in the form of absence and exclusion. However, this kind of self-exclusion from the field of politics can be seen as quite symptomatic and can be judged as a political gesture itself. Furthermore, we presuppose that this exclusion of all things political continued in the unofficial art in the form of absence or in the form of traces of the recent presence.

The term avant-garde is problematic, too. The unofficial Byelorussian art of this time is considered as a certain continuation of the Soviet avant-garde tradition of the 1920s (or as an extension of the formal tradition). We can also acknowledge the rushed and fragmentary appropriation of the European avant-garde and neo-avant-garde movements. The migration between the modern art movements—a certain negligence toward the conceptual core of these movements and an obsession with the formal experiments associated with modernism—was important. In the official/unofficial art opposition, the latter was mostly based on the stylistic antagonism with socialist realism. This confrontation could be based on the ideology of pure art (resistance to the perception of *art as a force having a huge impact on the general course of the struggle*), or in the philosophy of the so-called inner immigration of artists (their deliberate self-exclusion from the social and cultural public life). With some reservation we could say that avant-garde art was all the art that was not socialist realism, and represented therefore the eclectic mix of modernist artistic movements.

We will begin with the Estonian line of contacts, which is associated with the Estonian curator and fine art expert, Ninel Ziterova, who was particularly interested in underground art in the former USSR republics.

Ziterova worked in the Kardiorg Museum in Tallinn and was in contact with Ukrainian artists, one of whom, Petro Gulin, introduced her to Walera Martynchik.[7] At the beginning of the 1980s, the underground movements were spreading in Belarus, and Martynchik invited Ziterova to visit Minsk to see what was going on there and to visit unofficial artists' studios. Consequently, the idea emerged to organize an exhibition in the Estonian city of

7 Walera Martynchik was born in Belarus in 1948; after his studies at Minsk College of Fine Art, he created the dissident group Forma in 1987 (Kirillov, Khackevich, Martynchik, Zabavchik, Petrov and Malyshevski). The visual protest of the group took an apolitical form, the path of "inner immigration, away from the outer life, in all its roughness, stagnation, danger and banal simplification." Since 1990, he has lived in London.

Kohtla-Järve. Sergey Lapsha,[8] Vitaly Rozhkov,[9] Igor Kashkurevich,[10] Viktor Petrov,[11] Walera Martynchik, Konstantin Goretskii,[12] and Olga Sazykina[13] (with her works of art and those of Gennady Khatskevich[14]) took the train and went to organize one of their first exhibitions in a public space. The *Informal Art* exhibition took place in Kohtla-Järve in 1986. "It was quite a nervous time, 'unofficial artists' were not really prepared to become visible suddenly, it was a strange ambiguous desire to finally become public, which was associated with the strong fear of public criticism or the simple recognition of one's own vulnerability to not being accepted. But, anyway, it was so inspiring! I remember we lived in the same tiny apartment, all of us, forced to sleep like sardines in a can, but it was some kind of amazing too," said Olga Sazykina, one of the participants of these events.

After the exhibition, Ziterova visited Belarus several times and was invited to the exhibition of the art group "Form"; she also visited several artists'

8 Sergey Lapsha was born in Belarus in 1954. He graduated from the Byelorussian Arts Academy and became an abstract artist. He was one of the members of the dissident group Forma. Since 1997, he has lived in Tel-Aviv.

9 Pseudonym of artist Vitaly Kalgin (also known as Bismarck). He was born in 1959 and was diagnosed in 1988 with schizophrenia due to his work *Patriarch*, presented within the collective exhibition project *On Collectornaya*. In accordance with the joyless logic of punitive psychiatry (which remains in place in Belarus today) in October 2011, Vitaly Kalgin was condemned to five years of treatment with neuroleptic drugs.

10 Igar Kashkurevich, the son of Arlen Kashkurevich, a well-known Belarusian graphic artist, was born in 1957 in Minsk. He could be seen as one of the artists who defined the life of the Belarusian unofficial art of the time. He graduated from the Byelorussian Arts Academy in 1982. In tandem with the artist Ludmila Rusova, he introduced the aesthetics of the European contemporary art to the artistic community of the time. Since 1998, Kashkurevich has lived in Berlin.

11 Victor Petrov, born in 1957 in Minsk. He graduated from the Byelorussian Arts Academy in 1984 and was one of the creators and members of the dissident group Forma. He also participated in the creation of the independent art gallery "6th Line" (Minsk, 1992) and was curator of the Navinki International Performance Festival. He works and lives in Minsk.

12 Konstantin Goretsky was born in 1961 in the Kuril Islands. In 1987 he created the artistic group KOMIKON (Comic constancy), whose members claimed to create "playful, funny polystylistic art, outside the rules and conventions."

13 Olga Sazykina was born in 1955 in Moscow. She graduated from the Byelorussian Arts Academy in 1977 and became a member of International Association of Hand Papermakers and Paper Artists (IAPMA) and the Belarusian Designer Union. Her works of art are in collections in the National Museum of Art (Belarus), the Central Artists' House (Russia), the Zimmerli Art Museum (USA), the Corning Museum of Glass (USA), as well as in private collections in France, Germany, Holland, Italy, Lithuania, and Poland. She lives and works in Minsk. (The author of this article is more than grateful for her collaboration during the work on the text.)

14 Gena Khatskevich graduated from the Byelorussian Arts Academy in 1982. The famous story of his unsuccessful highjacking attempt is well known in artistic circles. In 1987 Khatskevich wrapped a piece of soap in wire, boarded a plane flying from Minsk to Rostov, showed the flight attendant a "bomb" (a piece of soap wrapped in wire) and demanded to be flown to Paris. Khatskevich didn't make it to Paris—he wound up in a pretrial detention center instead and was then sent to an asylum. (He finally did get to Paris, by the way.)

studios and bought some works of Chernobrisov, who was an important figure for the young unofficial artists of the time and was seen as a spiritual leader. He had, for instance, a list of St. Petersburg art collectors and galleries that he gave to young unofficial Byelorussian artists going to the city. This is how the young artists of the time realized their artistic entrance in St. Petersburg and sometimes found collectors willing to buy their works.

Ziterova organized the avant-garde art festival in 1988 in Narva, Estonia, in which avant-garde artists from the former USSR republics of Russia, Belarus, Estonia, Kazakhstan, Georgia and others took part. "We spent five days there. 'Novye dikie' presented their video, 'Mitki' were getting drunk, Kashkurevich presented his performances in the woods, Vladimir Lappo, Vitaly Rozhkov, Igor Zabavchik, Viktor Petrov, Valery Martynchik, Andrey Belov, Ludmila Rusova, Igar Kashkurevich and Olga Sazykina presented their works during the exhibitions. It was a good occasion to get out of the silence zone and to create a kind of unofficial art network with informal artists," said Olga Sazykina of the festival. During one of his performances, Kashkurevich and others got under the tarpaulin pretending to swim there as if they were in the water and then reappeared and announced the performance title "The Loneliness of the Individual in the Crowd."

The name of Ziterova is associated with the exhibitions in Krakow, too. Chernobrisov had several contacts with the Krakow Catholic Foundation, which aimed to open a small gallery in the central Catholic church to organize some exhibitions there. Some Byelorussian unofficial artists (Grigoriy Ivanov, Matvey Basov, Olga Sazykina and Igor Malyshevskij) took the opportunity to organize several exhibitions there.

As far as we can see, the accidental nature of unofficial artistic contacts led to the dissemination of art exhibition practices which could have some visible aftereffects consisting in the enlargement of networks or a certain interchange with, or entrance into, the art market. Several exhibitions were significant because they offered artists the experience of becoming public, but they remained nonetheless isolated actions.

After the exhibitions, Ziterova had the idea of organizing a large exhibition of Byelorussian unofficial artists entitled "With God in the Heart"; to this end, she bought the works of Goretsky, Sazykina, Chernobrisov and others for the Kardiorg Museum. For some unknown reasons, the exhibi-

tion did not take place and the works of art were probably left in the museum. Recent attempts to find the works have proved fruitless, and this seems to be the general problem of the unofficial art practices—the impossibility of tracing the path of the migration of works of art and the definite loss of some of these works.

Another line of unofficial Byelorussian artists' contacts with their colleagues from the former USSR republics and neighboring countries is that of Polish contacts, which we explored earlier with the description of the Krakow exhibitions. They date from the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, when it became possible to buy a three-day ticket (*putiovka*) from the labor unions.[15] Some artists had relatives living in Poland and could travel freely to Poland. Sazykina and Khatskevich used this opportunity to show the handmade catalogs of Byelorussian artists' exhibitions to owners of the galleries they stumbled across in Poland. This is how they found the gallery Napiórkowskiej w restauracji Pod Krokodylem, where the curator Katarzyna Napierkowska was working. She was more than interested in the works of art presented in the prospectus and was aware of the fact that the opening of the borders would be associated with the growing interest in the unofficial art of the former USSR republics. After a while, she went to Belarus to select the artists whose work she wanted to buy for the gallery. She was essentially interested in discovering the works of art that could be sold. In 1990, Katarzyna organized the first Byelorussian exhibition in Poland, where the diplomatic world community was largely presented. The works of Plesanov,[16] Malishevsky, Sazykina and Khatskevich were sold. There was TV coverage of the exhibition opening, and the story of the difficulties of the unofficial Byelorussian artists becoming public was told.

In 1991, the *Belart* exhibition of unofficial Byelorussian artists was organized in a deserted factory situated in the center of Warsaw. The exhibition was curated by the young curator from the Centre for Contemporary Art of Ujazdowski Castle. Works of art unofficially transported by train and by car

15 One of the curious signs of the time was the double life lead by unofficial artists. They combined underground artistic activities with official employment that gave them access to the materials and/or workplaces they needed to create their art, such as a job in a factory where glass painting was done, or access to basement ateliers, obtained from the housing department in exchange for creating decorative works for official celebrations.

16 Andrei Plesanov was born in 1948 in Minsk. He graduated from the Byelorussian Arts Academy in 1980. He is one of the most significant collectors of unofficial Byelorussian art and owns the largest collection of it. He has organized several exhibitions of Byelorussian unofficial artists inside and outside the country.

Figure 5.1.
Exhibition in the gallery Napiórkowskiej w restauracji Pod Krokodylem, 1989.
Courtesy of Andrei Plesanov.

were then randomly placed all over—on the walls, in the windows, on the floor, on the technical equipment. Because the exhibition breached certain organizational regulations, some problems arose. But Byelorussian artists recall this event as having been very inspiring and having given them the opportunity to meet German and Polish artists and curators.

The practice of canvas transportation could actually be seen as one of the punctual tactics of unofficial art resistance. There were strict rules concerning the export of works of art, and artists had to seek the permission of the Commission of the Ministry of Culture to take their work out of the country. To get this permission, they had to provide several documents, prove their authorship, pay the export duty and sign papers obliging them to bring their work back into the country. Moreover, it was not possible to take more than five pieces of work abroad. This is how certain techniques were invented, such as stretching several canvases over the same frame or hiding finished works underneath an unused canvas. Therefore, artists actually took unused canvases with them in order to create outside the country.

The curious practice of artistic journeys abroad, which could be compared with present-day artistic residencies, was becoming quite frequent during this

time. This practice could also be seen as a reaction to the restrictions on artists' freedoms within the country. Byelorussian artists thus made arrangements with gallery owners or people willing to buy works of art for their collections. Gallery owners or potential buyers provided artists with a place to live and work for one to two weeks in exchange for a few pieces created by the artists during the journey. The crew of six to seven artists lived in the same apartment, working in the night and visiting the galleries where they left their works during the day. The galleries were everywhere—every hotel had a little gallery and gallery owners were glad to have Byelorussian artists' work to sell or to include in their own collections. Katarzyna Napierkowska received unofficial Byelorussian artists in her cottage. The artists worked there and eventually left their work to be sold. Thus, contacts with galleries were established, exhibitions were organized and the laws of the art market were discovered. It is worthwhile to point out that dozens of works of art were lost in these circumstances, and we have no choice but see this as a one of the inevitable consequences of the fragmentary and accidental character of unofficial artistic practices.

Thus, the research carried out on the unofficial contacts of Byelorussian artists with artists and curators from the former USSR republics and neighboring countries in the period from the 1980s to the mid-1990s portrays the latter as fragmentary, particularly based on personal liaisons or accidental practices of gallery owners looking for art. Being undocumented, these contacts are mythologized by the main actors, and should be carefully verified. Further, it would also be preferable to try to trace the path of the migration of works of art lost during this time.

The lines of contacts explored in this article are not exhaustive and could be developed and completed (with the St. Petersburg and Moscow networks, for instance). The question concerning the development of these practices and especially of those traces in the actual situation in the Byelorussian art scene, with its rather symptomatic division between official and unofficial art, and the obligatory institutional regulations of the art field, remains open for further research.

6

Chocolate, Pop and Socialism: Peter Ludwig and the GDR

Boris Pofalla

In September 1976, the painter and president of the artist union of the GDR, Willi Sitte, received a letter from a West German person whose name he had never heard before.[1] The man introduced himself as Peter Ludwig, "CEO of Leonard Monheim KG, one of the largest chocolate producers in the world." More than a year ago, he wrote, an instant hot chocolate production plant operated by his company had been set up in Bergwitz (GDR), and he hoped for further cooperation to follow.

"As a sideline, in a way," he was an art collector and Honorary Professor of Art History at the University of Cologne. Ludwig named a few prestigious honors awarded to him in recognition of his activities, then quickly came to the point: he wanted to visit the painter's studio to see some recent work. Also, Ludwig was interested in collaborating with a museum of the GDR, possibly the Galerie Neue Meister in Dresden. "It would be an honor and an affair of the heart for me if I could help to close gaps within the overwhelm-

1 Peter Ludwig to Willi Sitte, Aachen (13 September 1976) as quoted in Claus Pese, "Willi Sitte. Werke und Dokumente," *Politik und Kunst in der DDR. Der Fonds Willi Sitte im Germanischen Nationalmuseum*, ed. Großmann Ulrich (Nuremberg: Germanisches Museum Verlag, 2003), 68.

ing wealth of the Dresden collections through permanent loans." Furthermore, he called it a "painful lack" that there was no contemporary art from the GDR on display in Western museums.

Sitte considered the letter. Four years before, the Basic Treaty between the two German states had been signed. It led to the establishment of diplomatic missions in East Berlin and Bonn, acceptance of both Germanies into the UN and a series of cooperation projects and mutual expressions of good will.[2] Still, there was no agreement on cultural exchange and very little was known in West Germany about the art created behind the Iron Curtain. One the one hand, a skeptical attitude was held by most West Germans toward socialist realism and the role of artists in a totalitarian regime. The GDR, on the other hand, was keen to defend its own *Nationalkultur* against Western influence and "cultural diversion." Any West German institution wishing to exhibit state-sanctioned art from the GDR could do so only in cooperation with the Communist Party of Germany, DKP. The first attempt at this had been made in 1975 by the (private) Hamburger Kunstverein under its director, Uwe M. Schneede.[3] For a public museum, dealing with the German Communist Party during the Cold War was impossible.[4]

What was Sitte to do with Ludwig's request? As it happened, the painter received a visit by his friend Horst Sindermann two days later. Sindermann was the president of the Council of Ministers, formally the GDR's chief executive body. Sindermann was more familiar with the name Peter Ludwig, calling him "a pioneer of the East–Western joint venture," made possible by the new head of state, Erich Honecker in 1971.[5] It enabled the citizens of the GDR to buy Western goods manufactured by Western companies within the GDR. A large share of the goods, from Blaupunkt stereo systems to Nivea skin cream, was exported back to the FRG where the low wages of the East-

2 Christian Saehrendt, *Kunst als Botschafter einer künstlichen Nation* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2009), 64–73.

3 Uwe M. Schneede, ed., *Willi Sitte. Gemälde und Zeichnungen 1950–1974* (Hamburg: Kunstverein Hamburg, 1975).

4 International exhibitions such as Documenta (since 1977) and the Venice Biennale (since 1982) were exceptions. See Gisela Schirmer, *DDR und documenta. Kunst im deutsch-deutschen Widerspruch* (Berlin: Reimer, 2005), and Matthias Flügge, "Die Beiträge der DDR zur Biennale Venedig," in *Die deutschen Beiträge zur Biennale Venedig 1895–2007*, ed. Ursula Zeller (Cologne: Dumont, 2007).

5 See Peter Krewer, *Geschäfte mit dem Klassenfeind. Die DDR im innerdeutschen Handel 1949–1989* (Trier: Kliomedia, 2008).

ern Bloc added to the profit of companies like Salamander, Bosch or Nestlé. The GDR was in dire need of foreign currency and consumer goods, and cooperation with Western companies was an indispensable part of the economic strategy of the GDR, and Ludwig was a loyal partner. Within two weeks, Sitte decided to accept Ludwig's offer. In December, the collector found himself in the studio of Willi Sitte in Halle.[6] Discreetly, Sitte steered him away from the Galerie Neue Meister, whose director, Joachim Uhlitzsch, was an informer for the State Security (Stasi), spying on artists and foreign representatives.[7] Instead, Sitte introduced him to Eberhard Bartke, the director of the National Gallery in East Berlin. Bartke saw Ludwig's offer as an opportunity to reconnect the National Gallery with Western art, a link brutally severed in 1933 and slightly renewed by Ludwig Justi between 1946 and 1957. Ludwig had become a public figure in 1968 as the only lender to the exhibition *Kunst der sechziger Jahre* in Cologne, introducing Pop art to a German audience.[8] Holding a PhD in art history, Peter Ludwig steered the family-owned Monheim KG, brought into the marriage by his wife Irene, née Monheim, who is an art historian, too. Peter Ludwig was a connoisseur of many fields, including illuminated manuscripts, classical antiquities and contemporary art, which he had been buying in bulk since the 1960s. Both collectors clung to the human figure and maintained a humanist worldview, with the art of the ancient Greeks as a foundation.[9] Ludwig's dissertation from 1949 had revolved around Picasso's idea of man, his *Menschenbild*, and put it into context with the one presumably held by artists and writers of the same generation.[10] Picasso, who had never abandoned figuration and whose communist, antiwar attitude was warmly welcomed in the GDR, featured prominently in Ludwig's collection. In 1977, hot chocolate and Picasso paintings were Ludwig's entrance ticket to the National Gallery of the GDR.

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6 Staatliche Museen zu Berlin–Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Zentralarchiv, VA 975, Correspondence of Director General Eberhard Bartke to Hans Joachim Hoffmann, 9 December 1976, unpaginated.

7 See Hannelore Offner and Klaus Schroeder, eds., *Eingegrenzt/Ausgegrenzt. Bildende Kunst und Parteiherrschaft in der DDR 1961–1989* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2000), 225.

8 Gert von der Osten, ed., *Kunst der sechziger Jahre. Sammlung Ludwig im Wallraff-Richartz-Museum* (Cologne: 1969).

9 Peter Ludwig, "Preface," in *Antike Kunstwerke aus der Sammlung Ludwig, Vol. 1*, ed. Ernst Berger (Basel: Zabern, 1979), 7–8.

10 Peter Ludwig, *Picassos Menschenbild als Ausdruck eines generationsmäßig bedingten Lebensgefühls*, Dissertation, Johannes Gutenberg Universität, Mainz (1950).

The exhibition *Contemporary Art* from the Ludwig Collection, Aachen, opened on 29 September 1977. "It wasn't treated like a sensation," recalls Hans Jürgen Papies of the National Gallery, "but it was."[11] Fourteen artists, including Roy Lichtenstein, Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns, were on display, as well as five works by Pablo Picasso which established a link to the first half of the twentieth century.[12] The selection had been made by Bartke and constituted the only example of international, Western art in the whole country. Although GDR artists were well-informed about contemporary Western art through illegally imported magazines and catalogs, having such works in the National Gallery was a sign of liberalization.

Cooperation between the socialist state and the art-loving capitalist was deepened during the following years. After 1977, Ludwig started buying art in the GDR at an unparalleled rate. At first, he focused on the key figures Willi Sitte, Bernhard Heisig, Wolfgang Mattheuer and Werner Tübke, who were sometimes called the *Viererbande* (Gang of four) due to their success and influence. The focus of Ludwig's interest later widened, but never touched the margins of underground art. To the patriot Peter Ludwig, the division between East and West German art was artificial, as both were primarily German. While West Germany had oriented itself toward Paris and later toward New York City, the artists of the GDR, appalled by the propaganda art of a Stalinist USSR, had nowhere to turn—and thus looked back. For that reason, "more German art" (Günter Grass) was created in the GDR, where painters like Menzel, Kollwitz, Corinth, and Beckmann were points of reference. An open-minded conservative with a preference for figurative painting, Ludwig was predestined to be susceptible to such art.

But what about the GDR? After successfully gaining international recognition in 1973, the cultural policy of the GDR was undetermined in the 1970s. The officials feared an influx of Western values, yet they were eager to see the GDR represented in the West.[13] More than once, Ludwig complained about the officials' lack of support.[14] The catalog of his exhibition in

11 Dr. Hans Jürgen Papies in conversation with the author, 13 July 2010.

12 Roland März and Hans Jürgen Papies, ed., *Zeitgenössische Kunst aus der Sammlung Ludwig* (Aachen, East Berlin: Staatliche Museen, 1982).

13 Saehrendt, *Kunst als Botschafter einer künstlichen Nation*.

14 Archiv Akademie der Künste Berlin, VBK Zentralvorstand, Sign. 174/4, Hans Mayr to Willi Sitte, 12 October 1978.

the National Gallery was delayed for five years—until Ludwig complained to his partner in business affairs, Günter Mittag. The influential Secretary of the Economic Commission within the Politbüro acted quickly. After a confrontational meeting of the Politbüro, the catalog was produced immediately, the preface written overnight by Hans Jürgen Papies instead of Eberhard Bartke.[15] In his foreword, Papies linked Ludwig's engagement to that of Wilhelm Wagener, whose bequest of 1861 had laid the foundation for the National Gallery.[16]

Although there were critics of his influence, neither the State Security nor ideologues like Kurt Hager had much to say when it came to Peter Ludwig. Erich Honecker's economic policy relied on welfare and an ever-increasing supply of consumer goods. It worked as a surrogate for a lack of democratic rights and was to prevent social unrest like in June 1953.[17] Therefore, Peter Ludwig was a key figure who could act within the GDR with great freedom. A permanent visa was granted to him allowing uncontrolled and unlimited entry into the GDR at all times; when necessary, Willi Sitte made a call to the border guards to speed things up.[18]

Ludwig first exhibited his eastern acquisitions in Aachen in 1979.[19] Before making contact with the GDR, he had bought works by Gerhard Altenbourg and A. R. Penck, who were not part of the official canon of the GDR. Especially A. R. Penck, closely watched by the Stasi, was considered a constant nuisance and a provocateur by Sitte and the Minister of Culture, Hoffmann.[20] Since the 1960s, Penck's works were smuggled out of the country by his gallerist Michael Werner, who had made him a prominent figure in the art world of West Germany. When the key representatives of the artists' union VBK were to be shown in Peter Ludwig's Neue Galerie in Aachen, Sitte called up Wolfgang Becker, the director of the Neue Galerie, telling him

15 Dr. Hans Jürgen Papies in conversation with the author, 13 July 2010.

16 Eberhard Bartke, "Foreword," in *Zeitgenössische Kunst aus der Sammlung Ludwig*, ed. Roland März and Hans Jürgen Papies (Aachen, East Berlin: Staatliche Museen, 1982), 5–7.

17 Günter Mittag, *Um jeden Preis. Im Spannungsfeld zweier Systeme* (Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 1991), 62–63.

18 Gisela Schirmer, *Willi Sitte. Farben und Folgen. Eine Autobiographie* (Leipzig: Faber & Faber, 2003), 254.

19 Wolfgang Becker, ed., *Kunst heute in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik* (Aachen: Neue Galerie–Sammlung Ludwig, 1979).

20 Bundesbeauftragten für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republik (BStU), Ministerium für Staatssicherheit (MfS), 6245/91, vol. 4: Letter by the Minister of Culture, Hans-Joachim Hoffmann to Ursula Ragwitz, Head of the Culture Dept. at the Central Committee of the SED, 14 December 1979, 43–47.

Penck's paintings had to be removed.[21] Today, Willi Sitte denies ever having demanded such a move.[22]

It was, in fact, Peter Ludwig himself who wrote an apologetic letter to Sitte, referring to Penck as an artist who was "demonstratively not a member of the association."[23] Hence, Ludwig wrote, he had ordered Penck's work to be taken down while those of the VBK elite were shown. As an early collector of Penck, Ludwig knew very well that this was not true. Penck had been trying to achieve full membership of the VBK for years, since it was a necessary precondition for a legal existence as a visual artist in the GDR. Given the circumstances, distancing himself from A. R. Penck was proof of Ludwig's goodwill toward the GDR. His priorities were now elsewhere.

Throughout the 1980s, Peter Ludwig bought and exhibited art from the GDR and the USSR in West Germany.[24] Although there was a growing interest in these artists among the general public, most German museums remained skeptical about the artistic relevance of artists willingly cooperating with the SED. Even Cologne's Museum Ludwig, named after the collectors after they donated some 350 works in 1976, excluded art of the GDR. Chiefly for that reason, Peter Ludwig founded the Ludwig Institute for Art of the GDR in 1983, whose goal was to exhibit and research art from East Germany. Ludwig loaned about 500 works to the city of Oberhausen, which provided its municipal gallery as a venue and bore many of the costs.[25] In theory, nobody in the GDR could interfere with the institute's curatorial practice, since all the works belonged to Peter and Irene Ludwig. For that very reason, the GDR regarded the emergence of the Ludwig Institute with a mixture of unease and satisfaction—satisfaction because it actively promoted the country's art, which was a key aim of the cultural policy of the GDR, and unease because this promotion was not under its strict control. An East German diplomat based in Bonn suggested his government should "try to influence the

21 BStU, MfS, Ast. Dresden, AOP 735/84: 77. See Offner and Schroeder, *Eingegrenzt/Ausgegrenzt*, 248; conversation between the author and Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Becker, 21 July 2010, Aachen.

22 Schirmer, *Willi Sitte*, 257.

23 AAdK, Berlin, VBK Zentralvorstand, 174/3, Peter Ludwig to Willi Sitte, 16 October 1978.

24 In 1980, Peter Ludwig traveled to the USSR invited by the Soviet ambassador to West Germany, Semjonov: BStU, MfS, Abt. XX/7, 6245/91, vol. 5, 22–26. For the work acquired, see Evelyn Weiss, ed., *Sowjetkunst heute* (Cologne: Museum Ludwig, 1988).

25 BStU, MfS, AP 645/92, Peter Ludwig to GDR Ambassador Ewald Moldt, 11 May 1983.

institution, about whose existence we can't change anything, to propagate the art of the GDR."[26]

As it turned out, that was not necessary. While Peter Ludwig could act freely in the GDR, his Ludwig Institute for Art of the GDR was keen to portray the country's cultural policy in a positive way. Most texts in the exhibition catalogs were compiled from earlier publications in the GDR.[27] Taking into account the small team working in Oberhausen and the few Western scholars familiar with this art at the time, cooperation with the socialist country was unavoidable. But the initial goal of the Ludwig Institute—to present and research art from the GDR from a Western point of view—collided with the collector's interest to maintain his special relationship with the GDR.

From the first group show "Durchblick" (See through) onward, the role of Peter Ludwig and the selection of artists was greeted by some and criticized by others.[28] "Durchblick" was, in any case, a canonic representation of what was considered good art in the GDR. When the exhibition traveled to West Berlin, German conceptual artist Hans Haacke commented on Peter Ludwig's eastern endeavors with an installation in the Neue Berliner Kunstverein. *Broadness and Diversity of the Ludwig Brigade* (Plate 6.1) was a site-specific work.[29] Haacke divided a room with a replica of the Berlin Wall and put an advertisement of the Monheim chocolate brand Trumpf on the western side. On the eastern side, the viewer encountered an oil painting mocking the agitational style of socialist realism. It shows Peter Ludwig in an apron, stirring chocolate with a beater. His pose is taken from August Sander's famous portrait of a *Confectioner* (1928), eluding the self-confidence of a master craftsman. In the painting, Ludwig is flanked by two women, one holding a banner calling for "solidarity with our colleagues in capitalist Berlin," the other demanding a pay rise. The woman to Ludwig's right is his wife Irene, the second, on the left, is Erika Steinführer, a labor heroine decorated for exceeding her

26 BStU, MfS, AP 645/92, Permanent Representation of the GDR, Bonn to Ministry of Culture, Report about the Foundation of the Ludwig Institute for Art of the GDR, 12 July 1983.

27 See Bernhard Mensch, ed., *Durchblick* (Oberhausen: Ludwig-Institut für Kunst der DDR, 1984) and Bernhard Mensch, ed., *Durchblick II* (Oberhausen: Ludwig-Institut für Kunst der DDR, 1986).

28 See press cuttings in NGBK Realismusstudio, ed., *Hans Haacke. Weite und Vielfalt der Brigade Ludwig. Materialien zu Werkentstehung und Rezeption* (Berlin: NGBK, 1985).

29 Hans Haacke, *Weite und Vielfalt der Brigade Ludwig*, 1984, multipart installation (oil on canvas and billboard), Falckenberg Collection, Hamburg; the title is an allusion to Erich Honecker's promise for "broadness and diversity" in the arts made in 1971.

output target in a light bulb factory. Through a publication, the public was informed about the Monheim chocolate factory in West Berlin, where low wages were being paid while the company profited from tax breaks afforded to the walled West Berlin.

Haacke's work is full of allusions. The devoted party member Walter Womacka had painted the portrait of Erika Steinführer in a Rauschenberg-inspired fashion, using screenprints for the first time in his career.[30] The lender of the only Rauschenbergs in the GDR was Peter Ludwig—and he was the one to buy Womacka's two-piece work, which had pleased even Erich Honecker.[31] While Haacke showed *Broadness and Diversity of the Ludwig Brigade*, the original *Erika Steinführer* by Womacka was on display in the Berliner Kunsthalle on Kurfürstendamm.

Hans Haacke pointed to the interrelation of the business and art activities of Peter Ludwig—and to an agreement among some West Germans that the official art of the GDR deserved a place in the museums of the West. It was, however, only the art approved by the SED, not the one created in the social margins and within the underground scene of the country. Still today, an easy definition of what a *Staatskünstler* is and who could claim to be a dissident is hard to make—sometimes established artists acted in favor of the artistic freedom of their young colleagues, sometimes they hampered it. Even critics of the regime were usually members of the VBK, and in general there were "enough public funds to be distributed to everyone," as Christoph Tannert put it in 1990.[32]

Still, Peter Ludwig supported artists who were having a difficult time in the GDR, such as Hartwig Ebersbach. The recognition gained in Oberhausen strengthened their position in the GDR. Besides the attention, Ludwig made sure the artists received a share of 15% of the price paid for their work, to be used for trips and shopping.[33] But they had to be loyal: when the painter Volker Stelzmann used his retrospective in West Berlin (organized by the Ludwig Institute) to leave the GDR, Ludwig stopped buying works from him.[34] Altogether,

30 Walter Womacka, *Erika Steinführer*, 1981, two pieces, oil on canvas, 148 x 282 cm, Ludwig Foundation, Aachen.

31 Thomas Grimm (director), *Walter Womacka*, 1994, uncut footage, 90 min., Defa-Spektrum GmbH Berlin,

32 Christoph Tannert, "'DDR-Kunst'—letztes Kapitel," in *Bilder aus Deutschland, Kunst der DDR aus der Sammlung Ludwig*, ed. Evelyn Weiss (Heidelberg: Braus, 1990), 60–66.

33 Schirmer, *Willi Sitte*, 257.

34 Bernhard Mensch, ed., *Volker Stelzmann, 1967–1985. Werkverzeichnis der Gemälde und Grafik* (Oberhau-

the exhibitions of the Ludwig institute became more varied in the second half of the 1980s, focusing less on the generation of Sitte, Heisig and Tübke. Young artists were allowed to travel to Oberhausen for a symposium in 1988.[35] It was, in fact, the West German government that refused to fund the institution on a permanent basis, arguing that its focus could endanger the idea of national unity, which was a key demand within the constitution of the FRG.[36]

As the Berlin Wall fell and the disintegration of the GDR began, Peter Ludwig tried to install his collections permanently in the National Gallery in East Berlin. In the autumn of 1989, he offered to donate about forty works of art plus sixty on permanent loan.[37] In addition, he promised to pay 100,000 DM a year to support the institution. In exchange, the entire contemporary branch of the museum had to be named after him.

While the director general was inclined to accept, a full meeting of the academic staff voted against the offer, fearing a loss of identity of the National Gallery—whose collection of art of the GDR would have become part of the Ludwig Galerie as well. As the offer was rejected, all loans were withdrawn from Berlin in 1991. Many of them found a new home even further east. Peter Ludwig was not interested only in East German art—from 1981, loans and donations had been made to museums in Vienna, Budapest (1988), St. Petersburg (1995) and, finally, Beijing in 1996.[38]

While his attempt to become an all-German patron had failed, Peter Ludwig continued to broaden horizons about Eastern art in the West and vice versa. While the Ludwig Institute for Art of the GDR in Oberhausen lost its purpose after 1990, East and West German artists were on display in Ludwig museums around the world, along with art from the respective countries. Paradoxically, Peter Ludwig's intention to unite German art before the reunification was not achieved in Cologne or Berlin, but in Budapest, St. Petersburg and Beijing.

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sen: Ludwig Institut für Kunst der DDR, 1986); Andreas Karl Öhler, "Vom Kalten Krieg zum warmen Händedruck," in Offner and Schroeder, *Eingegrenzt/Ausgegrenzt*, 439.

35 For a protocol, see, Bernhard Mensch, ed., "Probleme des Realismus heute," *Ludwig Institut für kunst der DDR. Informationen und Neuerwerbungen, Vol. 4* (July 1989).

36 The Federal Minister of Intra-German Relations, Rainer Barzel, in a letter to Peter Ludwig quoting: Bernhard Mensch and Peter Pachnicke, ed., *Deutsche Bilder aus der Sammlung Ludwig* (Oberhausen: Ludwig Galerie, 2006), 204.

37 Draft contract for the Ludwig donation offer, SMB-PK, Zentralarchiv, VA 5528, unpaginated.

38 For information on the respective cooperation projects, see Marc Scheps, ed., *Unser Jahrhundert. Menschenbilder, Bilderwelten* (Munich: Prestel, 1995), 253–60, and Bernhard Mensch, ed., *Sammlung Ludwig in Museen der Welt* (Oberhausen: Ludwig Institut, 1996).

7

Gabriele Mucchi's Career Paths in Italy, Czechoslovakia and the GDR

Fabio Guidali

Researchers who deal with artistic transfers in Cold War Europe cannot avoid encountering the Italian painter Gabriele Mucchi (b. Turin, 1899 and d. Milan, 2002). He was an uncommon figure both for his long stays in the German Democratic Republic and as an all-rounder intellectual. In fact, in his autobiography *Le occasioni perdute* (Blown chances), he described himself as a humanist whose main interests were not only painting but also architecture, design, translating poems, magazine illustration and politics as a member of the Italian Communist Party.[1] He was undoubtedly one of the most interesting representatives of realism in Europe for his early attempts at theorizing the movement after the Second World War, and because he was a real mediator between the blocs of Italian realism. His journeys, lectures, articles, and essays—and also his chair as guest professor in Berlin and in Greifswald—tell us of several and lively contacts which were kept alive thanks to his efforts despite the division of Europe.[2]

1 Gabriele Mucchi, *Le occasioni perdute. Memorie 1899–1993* (Milan: Mazzotta, 2001; first edition, Milan: L'Archivolto, 1994).

2 Fabio Guidali, *Il secolo lungo di Gabriele Mucchi. Una biografia intellettuale e politica* (Milan: Unicopli,

Son of the symbolist painter Anton Maria Mucchi and a member of the rich bourgeoisie, Gabriele Mucchi fought in the First World War and in 1923 graduated in Bologna, before deciding to give up his career as an architect and concentrate on his artistic calling. In Milan he approached the Novecento Italiano, an artistic movement that united most Italian painters of the time, although he never became a member of this group. Indeed, the Novecento—which initially professed its allegiance to magic realism and then turned to the public and propagandistic side of art—had to come to terms with the fascist regime, a condition which Gabriele Mucchi refused to comply with.

Following his long stays in Berlin and Paris (until 1934), his paintings slid into an intimistic vision and were influenced by a Christian attitude, especially by the frequent portrayal of angelic figures, yet Mucchi did not yield to the enticements of German expressionism and Picassism, which were in fashion in the European capitals of culture. Along with his first wife, Jenny Wiegmann (1895–1969), a German sculptress he married in 1933, he had the chance to meet the communist movement in Paris, but they had to break off these political links when they moved back to Milan.

Mucchi's house in Via Rugabella became a meeting point for antifascist intellectuals who opposed a form of art shaped by the state's aesthetic views; influential representatives of the Fascist Party tried to impose on the artist a role as an ideological go-between in society, following the path of Nazi Germany. Mucchi joined the group of younger painters and literati who had launched a cultural magazine called *Corrente* and, like them, endorsed the study of French painting of the nineteenth century in order to give life to a realist form of art interested in humanity in the social sense and not in the moods of individual characters. Moreover, he held down several jobs as a furniture designer and architect, cooperating with Giuseppe Pagano and other outstanding Milanese architects.[3] Mucchi supported modern architecture and believed that in building, as in painting, content is far more important

2012). See also Antonello Negri, ed., *Gabriele Mucchi. Un secolo di scambi artistici tra Italia e Germania* (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 2009); Melanie Ehler and Matthias Müller, eds., *Wirklich . . . wahr. Gabriele Mucchi und die Malerei des Realismus* (Berlin: Lukas Verlag, 2006); Raffaele de Grada, ed., *Gabriele Mucchi. Cento anni* (Cinisello Balsamo: Silvana Editoriale, 1999); Mattia Patti, "Mucchi, Gabriele," in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/gabriele-mucchi_(Dizionario-Biografico)/.

3 Augusto Rossari, Elena Bellini, and Paola Campion, eds., *Mucchi. Archivio dei progetti e dei disegni d'architettura* (Milan: Vangelista, 1993).

than form and has to shape the form itself in a functional way. In addition, architecture and art should reach everybody and not only be a gift for a chosen few.

When the Second World War broke out, Mucchi fought in the resistance against the German invaders and the Italian Social Republic and joined the Italian Communist Party. This move was more than a simple political decision because his accession to the party was the result of long and careful consideration. Indeed, his attention to poor or marginalized people had already been shown in his Paris paintings and could now be transposed in his new works, where *mondine* (women who work seasonally in the rice fields), fishermen and humble workers on strike were his favorite subjects. Moreover, he felt the need to convey messages through art in a plain way (Plate 7.1), so that his opinions about modern architecture recurred in the postwar period, too, as far as the social function of arts is concerned. The difference was in the educational tone and in his will to help people to understand art rather than impoverishing it by oversimplifying his style. For this reason he even read poems aloud[4] or explained his paintings to peasants as he considered that the artist was "the leader of an industrious army of creators." In an article he wrote for the party newspaper *l'Unità*, he revealed his position on the role of the artist in society: intellectuals cannot detach themselves from politics if they do not want to lose the liberty they have conquered through a hard fight.[5] Indeed, the intellectual is not an odd personality who has nothing to do with the rest of the people, as is supposed to be the case in bourgeois society; on the contrary, he is a common worker and has to contribute to the life of the nation, as he has ethical and political responsibilities like everyone else. This would mean he has to get closer to the life of other workers thanks to a form of art that is easy to understand but not imposed by the party itself.

Therefore, the difference between a painting of the year 1940, such as *La lettura* (The reading) and the first painting of the series *La guerra* (The war, 1943) or *Il fucilato* (The shot man, 1944) should not be ignored. In *La lettura*, intimism and tonalism in the footsteps of the painter Giorgio Moran-

4 A picture of Mucchi reading Mayakovsky to peasants in Santa Croce di Carpi can be seen on the cover of Thomas Kroll, *Kommunistische Intellektuelle in Westeuropa. Frankreich, Österreich, Italien und Großbritannien im Vergleich (1945–1956)* (Köln, Weimar, Wien: Böhlau, 2007).

5 Gabriele Mucchi, "Gli intellettuali e la politica," *l'Unità*, 26 September 1945.

di are still predominant, while *La guerra* and *Il fucilato* not only show the new themes of Mucchi's art but also a more instinctive and suffering attitude through a form that is always well-considered and never tends toward expressionism or abstraction. This evolution is even clearer in paintings, such as the series of the *Morte di Maria Margotti* (The death of Maria Margotti), depicting a young woman who had been killed by a policeman during a workers' demonstration near Bologna in 1949, and in many versions of *Il bombardamento di Gorla* (The bombing of Gorla, between 1949 and 1951). In this second case, Mucchi succeeded in portraying the tragic killing of 200 children during a bombing of a school near Milan by the Allies, without falling into a reporting style thanks to a choral composition based on Picasso's *Guernica* and to a meticulous study of color. Worth noting is also *L'operaio ucciso* (The killed worker, 1950; Plate 7.2), which shows important aspects of Mucchi's realism, such as his political and social engagement (as the picture represents the tragic labor conflicts in contemporary Italy) and "certain accentuations, that someone noticed as expressionist, which instead were caused by the need to render strong emotions and strong plastic impulses through strong expressive means."[6] Indeed, every formal element was justified by a specific need of expression, so that even nonnaturalistic colors or lines could shape a realistic painting.

The attention given to the problems of workers led him not only to work directly with rice weeders or farmers in the Pianura Padana (the Po Valley) at the beginning of the 1950s[7]—at a time when other artists had also followed this path under the influence of the Italian Communist Party—but he was also the first painter to exhibit his paintings in factories, as he had already done in 1948 among the workers in the city of Sesto San Giovanni (near Milan). Immediately after the war, he cooperated with the Italian Communist Party's official newspaper *l'Unità* and with the party's popular review *Calendario del popolo* (The people's calendar), in order to make the grounds of his pictorial development understandable in Marxist terms and to try to be the first to provide a theoretical definition of realism.[8] As his correspondence

6 Mucchi, *Le occasioni perdute*, 226.

7 Gabriele Mucchi, *Le mondine di Sannazzaro* (Rome: Edizioni di Cultura Sociale, 1951); Gabriele Mucchi, *Fra i contadini di S. Croce di Carpi* (Modena: Ghirlandina, 1952).

8 Antonello Negri, *Il realismo: dagli anni Trenta agli anni Ottanta* (Rome, Bari: Laterza, 1994).

with workers or peasants demonstrates, Mucchi never denied anyone his artistic and political explanations[9]; on the contrary, he was a promoter and contributor of the monthly *Realismo*, which was actually intended for both art experts and amateurs or art lovers.

From the articles Mucchi had been writing and the lectures he had been giving in Italy and abroad since 1950, a concept of realism emerges which differs from both socialist realism and its classical definition. Mucchi was far from any ideological and dogmatic constraints and from an art of the state, but above all, he did not refuse the formal achievements of art in the first decades of the twentieth century in his way of painting, though he opposed abstract art detached from reality. He was not satisfied with the traditional forms of realism prescribed by the Zhdanov Doctrine and had already criticized the verism of Soviet art which, in his opinion, had nothing to do with true realism, often being just a scholastic and naturalistic representation.[10] In this sense, Mucchi believed that the artist had not only to show the *whole* society, low and high classes, as intended by the classical vision of realism in the nineteenth century, but also to pass judgment on it in a political and ideological way. With Stalin's words (taken from *Dialectical and Historical Materialism*, 1938) he loved to say that the artist must dialectically choose elements from that "which is arising and developing" (that is to say, the working class and its struggles) and not decaying aspects of bourgeois society, which "is already beginning to die off." That would have prevented artists from ending up in intimism and pictoricism.

Mucchi's personality combined both a pictorial liveliness and the rare ability to make understandable for a large public the depth of theoretical reflections on art. This was the reason why it was Mucchi and not the leader of Italian realism, Renato Guttuso, who exported the movement to Eastern Europe. In particular, it is important to underline Mucchi's relationship with Czechoslovakia. He was at first invited in 1951 and had the chance of visiting the country and working there; then in 1952 his painting *La difesa di Praga* (Defense of Prague, 1952), exhibited at the Venice Biennale, was purchased by the Czechoslovak government, giving Mucchi another opportunity to

9 Università degli Studi di Milano–Centro APICE–Gabriele Mucchi Archive.

10 Such an opinion had already been given by Mucchi in 1949, but a critical article he had written about Soviet art was never published by the party press.

meet several Czech and Slovak intellectuals. His acquaintances included the translator Jaromir Fučík and Miroslav Mičko, who was the main promoter of Mucchi's successful one-man exhibition in Prague in 1955. In his reports to the Italian Communist Party, Mucchi described the great interest in his art among Czechoslovak intellectuals: he realized that such a thirst for knowledge was a consequence of the cultural isolation of the people's republics and he tried to put some of his friends in touch with Western European intellectuals through the *Société Européenne de Culture*, of which he was a member.

His main contact with Eastern Europe was, however, with the GDR. Thanks to his successful one-man exhibition in 1955, which took him to East Berlin, Dresden, Prague and Warsaw, in 1956 he was offered a chair as guest professor at the Hochschule für Bildende Kunst in Berlin-Weißensee. Mucchi had already given a lecture on Italian realism in East Berlin in 1951, and therefore people knew exactly which kind of art and thinking he would have brought to the GDR. He did not question the need to create an art for a large public, but he did insist on the fact that formal simplicity should not consist in merely proposing again the same models belonging to the nineteenth-century tradition; in his opinion, the new social content needed a new form. In addition, he underlined the fact that realism in art was not defined per se by the recognizability of forms but in the ideological interpretation of the subject in the Marxist–Leninist sense.[11]

In this way, he gained the approval of those who wanted to find room for formal freedom, since his appointment would have provided a contribution to the battle fought by those professors who were convinced of the historical need for realist art, but who did not know what to do with the Soviet verist model. Even the editor of the magazine *Bildende Kunst*, Herbert Sandberg, who had published several positive reviews on Mucchi's works, appreciated him. Indeed, while cultural officials expressed themselves in favor of the simplicity of expression, popular character, socialist content and dedication to the party in works of art, Sandberg downgraded all these elements in order to declare his refusal of any formalistic *divertissement* as the sole constituent

11 Stiftung Archiv der Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Gabriele-Mucchi-Archiv, Nr. 1, "Vortrag über den italienischen Realismus. Gehalten in d. Ak. der Künste, Berlin, 1951, während der Jugend-Festspiele." See also "Über Realismo," in *Gabriele Mucchi. Malerei und Graphik. Ausstellung im Alten Museum, Berlin, 26. Januar bis 3. April 1983*, 24–27.

of a realist work of art.[12] Mucchi's example hence became an important occasion to openly disapprove of the official cultural policy; he showed how it was possible to evolve from metaphysical art to realistic and socially engaged art, without excluding the connection with the pictorial tradition of one's own country. These two aspects were the most urgent goals to be reached by GDR art, and this was clear in the articles written on the occasion of Mucchi's exhibitions in 1955 and 1960.[13] On the contrary, the master of Italian realism, Renato Guttuso, could not be a good model for East German artists, since his style had evolved into a form of painting that mixed abstract and figurative elements. However, at the end of 1956, when Mucchi accepted that flattering offer, the political and cultural reaction was predominant, and he had immediately to resist the mistrust of party officials and the envy of some colleagues. His teachings revealed themselves as highly significant, since both the lasting relationships and the influence on a part of a generation of artists were derived from them. Indeed, Mucchi had the chance to build bridges with the local intelligentsia[14] both in Berlin and at the University of Greifswald, where he taught for a few semesters at the beginning of the 1960s.

We can affirm that what Mucchi himself embodied as a Marxist and as a realist was more decisive for his success in the GDR than his paintings.[15] Indeed, his works lost their importance for the Eastern European public when the passage from metaphysical art to new realist painting was no longer shown in the new exhibitions, contrarily to what had happened with his one-man exhibition in 1955; the cultural terror then picked on him, too. For example, he was reprimanded for giving his approval to the social and economic conditions but not to the state of painting in the GDR, for which Herbert Sandberg had been censured, too. In 1958, the official newspaper of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, *Neues Deutschland*, apparently criticized him for having badly painted a mural at the Frankfurter Tor of Berlin, *I taglialegna* (The woodsmen); but this criticism was actually a political accusation, because Mucchi had worked alone without communicating with other artists and art critics. In a country that was on the way to reaching socialism in art,

12 See Herbert Sandberg, "Das Beispiel Gabriele Mucchi," *Bildende Kunst* 5 (1955): 327–31.

13 See above all Konrad Kaiser, "Im Prozeß der Reife," *Sonntag*, 24 July 1955, 7.

14 See Gabriele Mucchi, *Theaterzeichnungen zu Bertolt Brechts Der gute Mensch von Sezuan* (Berlin: Akademie der Künste Archiv, 2007).

15 Elmar Jansen, "Mit wachen Augen gemalt," *Sonntag*, 3 July 1960, 13.

a work of art should no longer be an individual effort; instead, it should be collectively and socially created. In fact, Mucchi had been more courageously defying the regime on a cultural level since 1960, participating that same year in the foundation of the unfortunate art gallery Konkret.[16]

A strongly negative review of Mucchi's thought appeared again in *Neues Deutschland* in 1962,[17] when he tried to rehabilitate Picasso in the Eastern Bloc and defend the stylistic attempts of some local artists. "Yet the subject alone does not create realism," wrote the art scholar Ingrid Beyer, affirming that socialist realism needed a greater appreciation of form.

Mucchi had already taken three main teachings from past realist currents in 1960: the dynamic and dialectic elements of any cultural experience, the partial submission of the working-class party to the artist's judgment and the variety of realist forms. Mucchi evidently followed the ideas of the Austrian scholar Ernst Fischer, one of the most open supporters of artistic freedom, the latter not implying any interference of politics, a position which Mucchi had always defended since his opposition to fascism. The artist's political opinions were indeed considered as the most important element, since socialist realism was not to be intended as a style but as a personal political attitude.

All these recommendations and this advice were subject to a long repression, which was basically removed when all these ideas—once supported by the opposition—were gradually accepted, for example, at the Fifth Congress of the Verband Bildender Künstler Deutschlands in 1964. Mucchi had undoubtedly contributed to this acceptance, thanks to his role as a mediator; he had maintained from the beginning those ideas that, in the end, imposed themselves.

The firm belief in being right and doing his duty as a good communist, besides having ascertained that he had in any case more scope for his art in the GDR than in Italy (where realism was no longer backed by the Communist Party since the middle of the 1950s for fear of cultural isolation) convinced him to stay in the GDR for almost a decade, teaching at the university, and later to stay every year for a period in Berlin. However, it is evident that Mucchi did not at all share the cultural policy of the GDR. Neverthe-

16 Gudrun Schmidt, "Die Galerie Konkret in Berlin," in *Kunstdokumentation SBZ-DDR 1945–1990*, ed. Günter Feist (Köln: DuMont, 1996), 290–97.

17 Ingrid Beyer, "Das Thema schafft noch keinen Realismus," *Neues Deutschland*, 24 May 1962.

less, from the 1960s onward he became increasingly valued, even by some officials such as Erich Honecker, Klaus Gysi and Kurt Hager.[18] He was probably one of the few intellectuals who had consciously decided to say only positive things about the GDR abroad, clearly for reasons of political opportunity.[19] This mixture of opposition and support characterized his life in the Eastern Bloc and made his situation a real case study because nobody experienced this inconsistency as he did, both as opponent and as point of reference for local art and local politics.

His path can nowadays be reconstructed on the basis of his archives, divided between Milan (at the Centro Apice of the Università degli Studi di Milano and at the Politecnico, Faculty of Architecture–Dipartimento di Progettazione dell'Architettura) and Berlin (Stiftung Archiv der Akademie der Künste). Some of his works are the property of the national museums in Warsaw, Prague, Sofia and Berlin, but the difficulty of admiring his paintings, which are predominantly kept in private collections or in the museums' warehouses, would be sufficient to make him a genuine representative of Eastern artists who have been guiltily cast into oblivion since the fall of the Berlin Wall.

18 In 1984 Humboldt University in East Berlin awarded Mucchi a degree honoris causa in philosophy.

19 APICE–Gabriele Mucchi Archive, Attività nella Repubblica Democratica Tedesca, Scritti berlinesi, "Berlino-Est, Aspetti di vita e di cultura," 1958.

8

The Murals by Spanish Exile Josep Renau in Halle-Neustadt, a Socialist Town Built for Chemical Workers in the GDR

Anja Jackes

After Stalinstadt (Stalin Town),[1] Hoyerswerda and Schwedt, Halle-Neustadt was the last of the new towns built in the German Democratic Republic. It was designed to become the ultimate display of modern, state-of-the-art constructions in East Germany—internationally competitive in its architecture and construction technology—and the definitive implementation in urban development of the concept of the ideal socialist city. Under the leadership in the 1960s of chief architect Richard Paulick,[2] the project was realized between 1964 and 1986, despite numerous obstacles, frequent changes in personnel, economic crises and countless modifications. Based on the notion of a synthesis between architecture and the visual arts, the integration of socialist art into the public sphere was part of the urban development plans for Halle-Neustadt from the outset.[3]

1 Renamed Eisenhüttenstadt (Ironworks town) during de-Stalinization in 1961.

2 At the Bauhaus in Dessau, Richard Paulick was one of Walter Gropius's most important colleagues before leading the city development office in Shanghai for a number of years. After World War II, he became one of the GDR's main state architects.

3 "Direktive für die städtebauliche Gestaltung und den Aufbau von Halle-Neustadt" (1963), 5. As early as in the development plan, specifications for color schemes, placement of sculptures, murals, fountains, etc. were already defined.

A large number of visual artworks, murals and sculptures were planned, including monumental political works which would have an effect on the entire town as well as smaller, insignificant and apolitical designs. They were all supposed to enrich the architectural ensemble on a large scale, and to shape it ideologically. Between 1968 and 1974, the Spanish artist and exile Josep Renau (1907–1982) and his collective created one of the most interesting and innovative pieces of architecture-related art in the public sphere—and an example of the (much-discussed) synthesis of architecture and visual art in urban development in the GDR—in the educational center of the chemical workers' town of Halle-Neustadt.

This article is particularly concerned with the question of programmatic integration of visual art into urban spheres and the related discussion of synthesis as well as of its function. Using Renau's murals in the socialist town of Halle-Neustadt as an example, its artistic influence and history of origins will be explored and presented in the context of urban development and the holistic political-ideological framework to which it is related.

The planning of architecture-related art[4]—and in this context, chiefly commissioned political art—was a natural part of the planning process of architectural projects in the GDR. However, in its execution, a certain development is noticeable, turning away from the rather traditional concept of architectural sculpture in the National Building Tradition[5] of the 1950s and toward the concept of art in urban space of the 1960s and 70s. This change can be attributed to the introduction of industrial building methods in residential and urban construction in the GDR from the 1950s onward, and the concurrent architectural-political reform.

During the search for a new "socialist" concept of architecture, the relevance of architecture-related art also came under discussion. In the monotone, prefabricated construction, the party and state leadership in particular saw an opportunity for the development of a new, architecture-related form of art which—via innovative artistic means—could make new content conceivable[6] and augment "architecture with a little more conceptual and aesthetic significance."[7] Especially from the 1960s onward, art in the public sphere

4 The term "architecture-related art," as it is used here, denotes both works of art which are directly attached to a building as well as stand-alone sculptures, fountains, etc., which are part of an architectural or urban design.

5 Inter alia Joachim Palutzki, *Architektur in der DDR* (Berlin: Reimer, 2000), 45.

6 Martin Wimmer, "Synthese von bildender Kunst und Architektur," *Bildende Kunst*, 10 (1962): 538.

7 Bruno Flierl, *Architektur und Kunst. Texte 1964–1983* (Dresden: Verlag der Kunst, 1984), 28.

gained increasing significance. A synthesis of architecture and visual art was propagated,[8] which took up a dominant position in the theoretical discussions about architecture in the GDR and necessitated the undertaking of much research and development, which in turn was intended to form a base for artists and architects to help them accomplish the new demands. Increasingly from the 1960s onward, development plans were drawn up which already incorporated in their early planning phases visual artworks in urban spaces. This was with the intention that, rather than the artwork being subsequently added to the architecture as a decorative element, it would instead be an emancipated partner in a synthesis, designed to "enhance the aesthetic-ideological statement of the space."[9] In a subsequent step, from the mid-1960s onward, the complex socialist shaping of the environment was announced with the intention of encompassing the entire material environment of the people, namely the living, housing, and working spheres, thus taking effect "as a designed expression of the people's socialist way of life."[10] First and foremost, this was calculated to help shape the vision of the new socialist idea of man, as propagated by the state. Such a vision stated that a person possessed a wealth of skills and knowledge, was hard-working, had a distinct socialist consciousness, was always disciplined and acted morally according to socialist standards, displayed an active interest in culture and sports and had an altogether positive, optimistic view of life.[11] The programmatic integration of art into the public sphere is to be viewed as part of this enterprise, since visual art was seen as an essential contributory element to the development of a socialist consciousness. It became an integrating aspect in the planning of urban areas in the GDR, thus receiving a new form of publicity, and served as a significant means of carrying ideology.

These new architectural-political demands were to be implemented in the realization of the considerable urban development proposal in Halle-Neustadt

8 A discussion of "synthesis" under socialist guidelines had already taken place in postrevolutionary Russia. In 1919, a committee for devising a pictorial, sculptural, and architectural synthesis was set up as Subsection Sculpture of the Narkompros's Department of Visual Arts. See Hubertus Gaßner and Eckhart Gillen, eds., *Zwischen Revolutionskunst und Sozialistischem Realismus. Dokumente und Kommentare, Kunstdebatten in der Sowjetunion von 1917 bis 1934* (Köln: DuMont, 1979), 442.

9 "Kunstdiskussion," *Bildende Kunst* 5 (1955): 386. For the concept of synthesis, see Manuela Bonnke, *Kunst in Produktion. Bildende Kunst und Volkseigene Wirtschaft in der SBZ/DDR* (Köln: Böhlau, 2007), 270–79.

10 Flierl, *Architektur und Kunst*, 25.

11 At the 5th Party Conference of the SED in 1958, Walter Ulbricht presented the Ten Commandments of Socialist Morals and Ethics, which served as a basis and a guideline for correct socialist behavior.

alongside the experience of earlier large-scale city development projects, as well as a modern, complex, socialist living environment, based on the synthesis of architecture and visual arts and conforming to the ideological agenda of the state.

Hence, as early as in the development plans, color schemes, and the positioning of sculptures and fountains were already specified.[12] Particular importance was attached to the town center, which, in the context of the town as a whole, presented the architectural and artistic point of culmination. The integration of monumental art at architecturally prominent locations was also part of the plans, but could only be realized in the educational center of Halle-Neustadt.

The educational center forms the western part of the town center.[13] It was built between 1966 and 1971 and was one of the few areas of Halle-Neustadt in which the city-planning and visual-arts concept was largely realized. A draft proposal for the integration of artworks into the town was already developed in advance. An "Advisory Council for Visual Arts and Architecture," appointed in 1965, took responsibility for this, as well as for anything concerning the arts in Halle-Neustadt. It was controlled by the district council's Department of Culture and consisted of architects, visual artists, landscape planners, product designers as well as state officials. Its purpose was to substantiate the visual-arts concept by deciding upon the locations and the type of artworks in accordance with the political-ideological concept, and to oversee its realization—always in coordination with the governmental institutions. As with all other parts of the chemical workers' town, these so-called visual-arts conceptions were linked to an ideological agenda, which was developed as a "political-ideological framework" in collaboration with the Department for Agitation and Propaganda (Agitprop) in the district council of Halle.[14] According to this, the town center was to be themed "Setting up Communism."[15] The thematic guideline for the educational center was also aligned to this. Item 3 of the visual-arts conception states:

12 "Direktive für die städtebauliche Gestaltung und den Aufbau von Halle-Neustadt" (1963), 5.

13 With regards to urban development, the center of Halle-Neustadt is composed of three spatially separated areas: a shopping area with service and supply facilities; a cultural and administrative complex with an integrated central square for meetings and demonstrations; and an educational center, including a hall of residence for apprentices, schooling and sports areas, a dining hall, and a swimming pool.

14 Landeshauptarchiv Sachsen-Anhalt (LHASA), Abt. Mer, SED-Bezirksleitung, IV/A-2/3/83.

15 Halle Stadtarchiv, file number 1.7.639.7712: "Politisch-ideologische Konzeption und Grundsätze für die Arbeiten der Bildenden Künstler im Bereich der Chemiearbeiterstadt Halle-West vom 15.02.1966." Further subjects for individual housing complexes were the fight to protect peace, friendship among the peoples, struggle against imperialism, and the chemical industry's significance for scientific-technological progress.

> The educational center is an expression of the integrative socialist education system created in our republic. Universal education and the acquisition of cultural assets must become the desire in all levels of the population and all age groups. . . . Through the introduction to works of art, a sense of aesthetics and artistic interest should be formed. All works of visual art arranged within the area of the educational center should, in their form and technique, adhere to this relationship.[16]

In 1968, the artists' collective of Josep Renau, Helmut Diehl, René Graetz, Karl Rix and Herbert Sandberg was commissioned to design the exterior walls of the swimming pool, the dining hall and the apprentices' hall of residence—altogether about 700 square meters.[17]

Josep Renau favored a unifying concept spanning all those buildings which would be visible from the central part of the town center as well as the Magistrale, the town's main arterial road. He planned four giant, thematically linked murals, whereas the other artists preferred building-related, autonomous solutions.[18] In the course of this planning process, serious differences developed within the collective.[19] These discrepancies regarding the execution resulted in the decision, taken by the "Advisory Council for Visual Arts and Architecture" in 1969, that Diehl, Graetz, Sandberg and Rix were to design the swimming pool under the theme "Bathing People,"[20] and that Josep Renau would design the dining hall and the two gables of the apprentices' hall of residence[21] with his own team, still based on the overarching theme "Setting up Communism."[22] The artistic work of such a large scale that Josep Renau planned for the educational center in Halle-Neustadt, a conception

16 Halle Stadtarchiv, file number 2.1 HAG Ho Ha-Neu 3415.

17 Eva-Maria Thiele, "Neue Wandbilder von José Renau in Halle-Neustadt," *Bildende Kunst* 5 (1975): 225–29.

18 Anke Kunze, "Josep Renau—Über Mexiko in die DDR. Eine Betrachtung seiner architekturgebundenen Kunst mit Schwerpunkt Halle/Saale" (Thesis, Martin Luther Universität Halle-Wittenberg, 2003), 62.

19 Only eight months after receiving the commission, Renau informed Chief Architect Richard Paulick of the dissolution of the collective for "serious reasons" (Halle Stadtarchiv, file number 3263 IV b).

20 In architecture-related art of the GDR, there are many designs which thematically allude to the function of the building they are connected to. An example for this is Willy Neubert's monumental mural *The Press as a Collective Organiser* (1964) on the *Freiheit* newspaper building.

21 Halle Stadtarchiv, file number 3263 IV b.

22 Members of staff were: U. Reuter, E. Scholz, R. Skipphaler. See Wolfgang Hütt, "Auftragsvergabe und Auftragskunst in Halle-Neustadt 1964–1972," in *Enge und Vielfalt—Auftragskunst und Kunstförderung in der DDR*, ed. Paul Kaiser and Karl-Siegbert Rehberg (Hamburg: Junius Verlag, 1999), 392.

with a short-range as well as long-range effect, represented an innovative approach in the development of architecture-related art in the GDR.

Josep Renau, who relocated to East Berlin on the invitation of the GDR government, was born in 1907[23] in Valencia, Spain. At the age of 12, he enrolled as a student at S. Carlos art college (1919–25). Renau was politically active and a committed artist and cultural functionary in the Communist Party. The early 1930s, in particular, significantly shaped his artistic and intellectual development. He worked in the disciplines of poster art, photo montage, and film.

During the Spanish Civil War, Renau acted as head of visual-arts propaganda for the Republican Army and as political commissioner.[24] In 1939, he fled the Franco regime and emigrated to Mexico.[25] During the time of the Spanish Civil War, he had met the Mexican muralist David Alfaro Siqueiros.[26] Having arrived in Mexico, Siqueiros welcomed Renau into his painters' collective. In 1939, they worked together on the mural entitled *The Face of the Bourgeoisie* on the electricity union building in Mexico City.[27] Renau wrote about this collaboration: "My initial concept of mural painting, which I derived from my work on posters, underwent a profound and salubrious transformation, starting at the moment I came into contact with the Mexican master. In Spain, that happened on a theoretical level, and then in Mexico through our collaboration."[28] Along with Diego Rivera (1886–1957) and José Clemente Orozco (1883–1949), David Alfaro Siqueiros (1896–1974) was part of the so-called "Big Three" of the postrevolutionary Mexican *muralismo* art movement. The mural, as a democratic art form with an extremely high number of recipients, was considered to be a highly appropriate medium with which to communicate a historical awareness, revolutionary successes and the new ideals to a mainly illiterate population, creating a sense of identity.

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23 17 March 1907 in Valencia.

24 Josep Renau, "Erinnerungen an Spanien," *Bildende Kunst* 12 (1982): 581–84.

25 Luis Suarez, "José Renau in Mexiko," *Bildende Kunst* 8 (1968): 409–13.

26 Siqueiros came to Valencia in 1937 to work in the art of agitation and propaganda. Immediately upon arrival, however, he joined the Spanish army in support of the fight and became an adjutant and later a commander. See Raquel Tibol, ed., *David Alfaro Siqueiros. Der neue mexikanische Realismus* (Dresden: Fundus, 1975), 45.

27 Pictures in Suarez, "José Renau in Mexiko," 412.

28 Suarez, "José Renau in Mexiko," 409.

Siqueiros and Rivera, who both spent several years in Europe, took back home their impressions of the avant-garde movement and the frescoes of the Italian Renaissance. The artists combined these impressions with the new form of art demanded in Mexico, a form of art "within the framework of a cultural-political program, whose fundamental pillars were nationalism, the people and education."[29] Mexican folklore motifs were mingled with a modern, avant-garde conception of art and with revolutionary themes. The monumental paintings were intended to have an impact on the masses and to illustrate and convey to the people a sense of their own culture, Mexican history and the necessity of social change.

After he had emigrated to the GDR, Renau was asked in an interview about his strongest impression of Mexico. He replied:

> The phenomenon of mural paintings. In it, I realized for the first time how a realist and modern expression can unfold its full abundance, its highest form, which is at the same time its most traditional. I find it fascinating to see that this abundance occurs in the work of personalities who are equally strong and yet diametrically opposed to each other concerning their understanding of the wall area, as is the case with Orozco, Rivera, and Siqueiros. . . . Orozco was, without doubt, the person who impressed me the most with his deeply Spanish-Baroque resonances. Siqueiros, on the other hand, influenced me with the open and dynamic character of his pictorial conception, with his revolutionary boldness in his treatment of the wall and, above all, with his stupendous creative assimilation of the tradition of pre-Hispanic glyptics. . . . I lived with David, worked, argued and almost brawled with him.[30]

The design drawn up for Halle-Neustadt was Renau's first project for a monumental mural in the GDR. His proposal to create a panorama picture—a joint composition stretching across several buildings—which would be matched visually and with regards to content, represented a novelty in ar-

29 Nana Badenberg, "Wandbilder-Bilderwandel. Diego Rivera im Blick seiner europäischen Betrachter," in *Wildes Paradies—Rote Hölle. Das Bild Mexikos in Literatur und Film der Moderne*, ed. Friedhelm Schmidt (Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 1992), 130–59.

30 Suarez, "José Renau in Mexiko," 409.

chitecture-related art in the GDR (Plate 8.1). On 11 November 1969, in a letter to the Director of Economy in the main contracting body, Komplexer Wohnungs- und Gesellschaftsbau, Renau wrote:

> I consider it absolutely necessary to emphasize the fact that the dimensions of the two walls of the hall of residence (7 times 35 meters each) in conjunction with their vertical position pose problems for both the conception and the execution, for whose solution in the area of exterior wall design there is no precedent anywhere in the world. As far as I am aware, this is the first time a practical solution for such problems is being undertaken.

He initially started his preparations with a motion study which assumed that the direction of movement would be from the dining hall toward the hall of residence.[31] Even though the buildings are staggered, to the distant viewer they appear to be on one level. Furthermore, the distant viewer should perceive the ensemble in its entirety as an abstract formation. He simulated the effect of close and distant vision in several studies.[32]

Renau's design was implemented with numerous corrections regarding the style, colors, and content, which were time and again demanded by the contracting body in a long-winded, bureaucratic process.[33] The ensemble consists of two murals in an extreme vertical and ribbon-like horizontal format. The images, which are visible from a long way off to the east, are distinguished by their remarkably modern and experimental visual aesthetics, intensive chromaticity and enormous stereoscopic effect. On 28 December 1970, Renau stated in a letter to the main contracting body, Komplexer Wohnungs- und Gesellschaftsbau:

> It is by far my best monumental work. In it, I have succeeded in making flesh the most essential aspects of my artistic experience in the area of mural painting, which I collected during my twenty years of emigration

31 Picture in Thiele, "Neue Wandbilder von José Renau," 227.

32 Picture in Thiele, "Neue Wandbilder von José Renau," 226.

33 Stadtarchiv Halle, Correspondence of Renau and the main contracting body Komplexer Wohnungs- und Gesellschaftsbau (HAG), Halle City Archive, Halle-Neustadt City Council, file number 3263 IV b.

> in Mexico, in personal collaboration with David A. Siqueiros, my great teacher, comrade and friend. Furthermore, it is the most optimal result of those twelve years in which I've been fighting on the theoretical and practical level for a new, socialist monumentality in the GDR. [34]

The compositions, executed in majolica on stoneware tiles, gloriously proclaim—in compliance with the overarching theme—the socialist utopia of progress and the future far into the urban space.

Concerning the design of the complex, it is advisable to read it from north to south. The northernmost staircase gable is themed *Unity of the Working Class* and *Foundation of the GDR*. The illustration opens with a monumental handshake. Behind that appears a demonstration, out of which flags and banners protrude. From the center of the crowd grows a monumental ear of wheat, flanked to its right by a microscope and to its left by a giant organ pipe. The composition is crowned by an all-dominating head of Karl Marx. The wheat symbolizes agriculture, the microscope represents science and technology, the organ pipe denotes the arts. The wheat as the central element also stands for fertility and growth, in the picture it grows out of the unity of the workers and the farming community.

The second staircase gable, entitled *The Forces of Nature and Technology Mastered by Man*, is dominated by a moving crowd of people who appear to be conducted by a workman. He stands in front of the procession, arms raised, his right hand clenched in a fist. In contrast to the anonymous demonstration on the northern gable, the people here are portrayed as individuals. Renau modeled them after studies of friends and acquaintances— even he, himself, is depicted among them. Like Karl Marx's head, their facial features are realized in a woodcarving style.

Skyscrapers, industrial plants, and a rocket shoot out from the crowd, crowned by a depiction of a soviet star which floats above the procession. The giant cogwheels and cosmic figures emphasize the perceived upward movement. Unlike the northern gable, which celebrates socialism, or rather, the socialist state, the second gable refers to the power of the working class and the resulting technological and cultural progress under socialism.

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34 Halle City Archive, Halle-Neustadt City Council, file number 3263 IV b.

The most impressive of the three murals is the one on the dining hall wall, under the motto *March of the Youth into the Future*. It is 5.5 meters high and 43 meters long, and it covers the whole of the building's facade. In contrast to the upward-reaching gables, a dynamic horizontal movement governs the image composition here. The scene opens at the northern end with a group of young people who stroll from right to left. Following the walking direction, the velocity of the people increases. Ahead of them, the movement breaks out toward the front. Following the movement, the people grow in size. A group of athletes breaks away from the crowd. Their goal is an open book, *The Communist Manifesto*. Above them is a group of bayonet-armed revolutionary fighters. In contrast to these dynamics, a group at the lower end of the picture is engaged in topographical surveying. The strict separation of both groups becomes abundantly clear, but so does their shared goal. Ahead of them both flies a flock of stylized doves.

The depiction continues around a curved corner of the building toward a landscape destroyed by war, above which a plucked eagle is enthroned. Opposite this, two doves are seated, symbolizing the new era. The composition was ingeniously aligned to the perspective of the passer-by. The third design, continuing the theme of socialist state and technological and cultural progress, shows—almost at ground level—the universally educated, new socialist people, jointly and optimistically striving toward the ideals and objectives of socialism, accompanied by their merits and achievements. The sequence of the compositions, often simultaneously aligned, is reminiscent of montage and evokes cuts and cross-fades, lending the design a strong momentum.[35]

Renau's murals in Halle-Neustadt were unmistakably influenced by revolutionary Mexican muralism. They were of a decidedly superior quality to the often simplistic solutions found elsewhere. The integration of avant-garde tendencies, such as cubist, futurist or surrealist influences—which only a few years previously were frowned upon in the GDR as being formalist—were conspicuous in his work. Despite the limited opportunities the architecture afforded the designs, the expansive and highly visible compositions could, in their gray surroundings, be understood to form a synthesis.

35 Due to irreparable damage, the redesign of the building was planned in 1988 and executed in 1996. During its removal—despite being a listed piece of art—large parts of the mural were destroyed, which made proposals to install it elsewhere redundant. Today, the remnants of the majolica painting belong to GWG and are stored in Halle.

However, the murals in Halle-Neustadt did not achieve the intensity and dynamics of the Mexican murals, nor their expressive formal vocabulary. This was doubtlessly influenced by the contracting body's heavy interference with the stylistic and creative process, their insistence on simplistic forms and their enforcement of changes in content, which ultimately also resulted in the dilution of the planned aesthetic effect of the composition. Nonetheless, this design of Renau's is one of the most outstanding and most experimental examples of architecture-related art in the GDR and is regarded as epitomizing the synthesis between architecture and visual arts.

9

Women Artists' Trajectories and Networks within the Hungarian Underground Art Scene and Beyond

Beata Hock

Around the early 2000s when i first came to work on the subject of contemporary Hungarian women artists, i encountered a more or less solid professional consensus: a discourse of lack.[1] It proffered the credible insight that in Hungary there was no grassroots feminism in the 1960–70s that would compare to the Western movement of the same period, and many of the related intellectual discourses were not widely endorsed either. The assessment then stalled here to conclude, therefore, that no meaningful art practice had developed that could be interpreted from a feminist perspective—until, in the mid-1990s, a younger generation of artists could find inspiration in "international" feminist discourses which finally became available after

1 The usage of the lowercase 'i' pronoun signifies my reservations about a unique convention in the English language. English capitalizes and thus prioritizes the first-person singular, which comes across as a remarkably self-centered disposition conveyed by the current lingua franca, and as such may deserve to be denaturalized. My usage continues T.R.O.Y.'s practice in his essay, "The New World Disorder—A Global Network of Direct Democracy and Community Currency," submitted for the Utopian World Championship 2001, organized by SOC, a Stockholm-based nonprofit organization for artistic and social experiments. The text is available from http://utopianwc.com/2001/troy_text.asp (accessed 11 July 2007).

the Iron Curtain was lifted.[2] In the midst of this vast lack there stood Hungary's only self-identified feminist artist: Orsolya, a.k.a. Orshi Drozdik.

Despite this well-established narrative framework, for me it seemed plausible to devote some attention to the "socialist way of women's emancipation" that, in Eastern European societies, ran parallel to the second wave of modern feminism, both a social and artistic movement. True, this "emancipation" had its many flaws and caused discontents, but recent social science research acknowledges that it also propounded an intense political rhetoric on "women's equality" and implemented actual pieces of legislation and very real social policies, which together brought enormous and documented changes to women's lives and identities. Hence it seems plausible to posit that the unprecedented state-administered attempt in socialist countries to rearrange gender regimes just might have impacted in some ways on women's self-perception as well as creative aspirations.

This article draws on the findings of research that was to critically reconsider the alleged absences and presences of feminist art in Hungary from the late 1960s to the mid-1980s.[3] I started out from the recognition that (a) cultural production—and feminist art-making especially—is always embedded in a given social, cultural and material context; and (b) that the gains or grievances, the demands and identity constructions of women in the "Second World" were arguably different from those in developed capitalist democracies. Therefore, rather than looking for the emergence of readily recognizable feminist artistic rhetoric and subject matter as we know these from Western-based feminist cultural criticism, my exploration tried to clear up a more open space for the kind of gender-related critical interrogations that may emerge from a different social and cultural context.

In a conscious attempt to move away from the existing conceptual framework greatly reliant on the terms and definitions of a Western-developed feminist agenda, i set out to interrogate records, works of art, persons and

2 See, for example, the contributions by Katalin Keserü or János Sturcz in Katalin Keserü, ed., *Modern magyar nőművészettörténet: tanulmányok* (Budapest: Kijárat, 2000); Edit András, "'Megoldotta a nőkérdést': Szőnyei Tamás interjúja," *Magyar Narancs*, 5 October 2000; and, to give a regional dimension to the topic, Katrin Kivimaa, "Introducing Sexual Difference into Estonian Art: Feminist Tendencies during the 1990s," *n.paradoxa* 14 (February 2001).

3 This investigation is presented in a broader socio-cultural framing in B. Hock, *Gendered Creative Positions and Social Voices: Politics, Cinema, and the Visual Arts in State-Socialist and Post-Socialist Hungary* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2013).

events that have eluded the attention of the nascent feminist art critical discourse in Hungary. My initial clues were some unprocessed documents found in the Artpool Art Research Center, Budapest: a small pile of handwritten and typewritten sheets. One of them bore the date 1979, was signed by art historian Zsuzsa Simon, and its heading read: "Four questions I asked myself after Dóra Maurer's feminist meeting." As a next obvious step, i interviewed the women named in the above sources and consulted their private archives. Artist Dóra Maurer directed me further to a handful of fellow artists and art professionals who had been receptive to feminist ideas—certainly including Orshi Drozdik as one of them.

Orsolya Drozdik (b. 1946) graduated from the Budapest Fine Arts Academy in 1977; she left the country the following year, and later settled down in New York. Since 1989, Drozdik has partly been based in Budapest again. In the 1970s she started to confront traditional male-biased art practices and problematized the limited choice of role models available to her as a female artist. According to her statements from the 1990s, she started to operate from a female perspective without an awareness of an ongoing feminist discourse on the same topics elsewhere.[4] The source of her "inspiration" was rather the masculine atmosphere of the neo-avant-garde in which she was to start her creative practice.[5] When talking about the reception of her practice, Drozdik relates that she perceived herself as an equally accepted member of her early-career artist community, but the fact that her works brought a female perspective into play was met with indifference at best. Even if these endeavors were not exactly refused, the blank indifference gave Drozdik the impression that she was dealing with this topic in a vacuum.[6] Her recollections of the neo-avant-garde circle convey that the patriarchal perceptions of the alternative art world did not differ much from patriarchal perceptions defining

4 Interview with Orsolya Drozdik, 2001. October 27 (Budapest). See also other interviews taken with the artist: Orsolya Drozdik, "Kulturális amnézia avagy a történelmi seb. A feminizmusról," *Balkon* 1 (January 1995): 7, and Orsolya Drozdik, "Fátyol alatt. Tarczali Andrea interjúja," *Balkon* 7–8 (July–August 1999): 6.

5 In the state-socialist period "avant-garde" and "neo-avant-garde" became umbrella terms to signify any artistic activity that did not submit to official party ideology. This non- or semi-official cultural underground of state-socialist Hungary came to be referred to as operating in a second, or parallel, public sphere. Turning away from official public activity, members of this "counterculture" relied on a parallel set of channels of social communication.

6 Orsolya Drozdik, interview, Budapest, 27 October 2001. See also the artist's testimony in O. Drozdik, *Individuális mitológia. Konceptuálistól a posztmodernig* (Budapest: Gondolat, 2006), 53–57.

official culture, and women's perspectives could not form part of the prevalent artistic idiom of the period.

Later phases in Orshi Drozdik's œuvre continue to show a clear correspondence to the developments in feminist criticism—indeed, as art critics asserted, she had built her career around this matrix.[7] When back in Hungary, Drozdik wrote in the art press about, and edited a rather advanced reader in, feminist theory,[8] took care to explicate her artistic position in interviews and articles,[9] and published a monograph on her own creative work.[10] As both the artist and a reviewer of her book pronounced, the purpose of this monograph was to remedy the omission of local critical attention to duly assess her œuvre.[11] Through these discursive activities, the artist took an active share in constructing and reifying her persona as the first and only Hungarian visual artist who exhibited an informed interest in subject matter inspired by feminist theory even in the relative absence of any accessible knowledge of this intellectual trend. In her recent monograph, however, the artist gives an account of a short-lived feminism-inspired exchange with some of her female colleagues.

In earlier accounts of women's art in Hungary, Dóra Maurer (b. 1937) was usually mentioned for her systematic, rational thinking, her creative "perseverance and 'masculine' consistency" as well as her dynamic activity as an art organizer.[12] The artist herself has never been identified as feminist and her œuvre—painterly experiments with geometric shapes, color qualities, and spatial effects—could hardly be associated with feminist thinking and artistic expression. Nevertheless, as the archival traces and the interviews with her and other artists revealed, not only is she an enthralling informant from the perspective of the availability and perceived relevance or irrelevance of femi-

7 Andrea Tarczali, "A 'női' hang megjelenése Drozdik Orsolya művészetében," in *Women's Art in Hungary 1960–2000* (Budapest: Ernst Museum, 2000), 96; Erzsébet Pap Z., "Az én fabrikálása: Drozdik Orsolya retrospektív kiállítása," *Új Művészet* 12 (December 2001): 20; Beata Hock, "Vector Art: Orshi Drozdik's Retrospective Exhibition and the Ensuing International Symposium *Anatomies of the Mind, the Body and the Soul*," *Praesens* 1:1 (Winter 2002): 71.

8 Orsolya Drozdik, ed. *Sétáló agyak: kortárs feminista diskurzus* (Budapest: Kijárat, 1998).

9 Drozdik, "Kulturális amnézia"; Orsolya Drozdik, "'Én voltam a modell és a modell rajzolója,'" *Élet és Irodalom*, 1 March 2002.

10 Drozdik, *Individuális mitológia*.

11 Ibid., 79, 134; see also Andrea Máthé, "Megírni önmagunkat. Drozdik Orsolya: *Individuális mitológia. Konceptuálistól a posztmodernig*," *Balkon* 2 (February 2007): 43.

12 János Sturcz, "Identities and Contexts: Masters of the Old and New Generations in the 60s: Dóra Maurer," in *Women's Art in Hungary 1960–2000* (Budapest: Ernst Museum, 2000), 35.

nist critical perspectives in Hungary in the 1970s, but she also turned out to be an engine of related inquiries.[13]

Most of the newly discovered documents proved to be hers: a transcript of an interview with the members of the Vienna-based "International Action Community of Women Artists" (IntAkt), her notes taken after the interview and a tape-recorded radio broadcast (all documents date from 1979). The radio broadcast (*"F": Nők a művészetben* ["F": Women in the arts]) was a discussion that Maurer initiated and moderated about the position of women in the visual arts. The occasion was a small-scale all-women exhibition in Budapest organized by Lóránd Hegyi. Mauerer also reported on her encounter with the IntAkt members. Apparently, Maurer—who had partly been based in Vienna since 1967—mediated relevant information between the Austrian capital and the Hungarian scene just as a number of other artists did, disseminating and sharing information on personal experiences of international art events and tendencies. Maurer's query also documented how the Austrian feminists and fellow artists were intrigued by the working of a gender regime in Hungary that legally guaranteed women's rights to professional self-development.

Maurer today says that her interest in feminist thought was part of a general intellectual openness and was not more personally motivated than "the interest of a bug collector in any unfamiliar creature,"[14] nevertheless, as the above documents reveal, she made substantial efforts to disseminate, both publicly and more privately, issues of feminist criticism. The manuscripts of both Maurer and Simon, as well as the speakers' contribution in the radio broadcast, show a clear understanding of feminist views on the identity of women as social subjects and creative workers and the inequalities they face on both levels. But at the end of the day, Maurer or Simon did not feel that feminist concerns could really speak to them. Their accounts agree on the view that the discourse on women's equality was indeed liberating, and that their perception was that they as women had never encountered open resistance or institutional discrimination as long as their professional output proved to be good.

Another clue i found in the Artpool Archives were bits of documents referring to an ensemble of work by Judit Kele—a participant in Maurer's radio dis-

13 Dóra Maurer, interview, Budapest, 10 January 2009.
14 Email correspondence with D.Maurer, 3 December 2008.

cussion and one of the few women Maurer named who exhibited a more profound and lasting interest in feminist problematizations than herself. Judit Kele (b. 1944) graduated in 1976 in textile design from the Budapest Academy of Applied Arts. She left Hungary in 1980 and is today based in Paris. It is difficult to assess to what degree her departure was a premeditated escape from a limiting and tightly controlling political and professional/cultural environment that she vividly described in our interview,[15] or the ultimate consequence of a series of work, *I Am a Work of Art.* This is a peculiarly gendered piece that begs the invention of a new genre, that of "*social-body* art," to underscore how the artrtist did not only expose her physical body, but her entire existence to an unforeseeable process. At the 1979 *Textile without Textile* exhibition (Young Artists' Club, Budapest), Kele presented a photo performance of that title in which she substituted her own naked body for the medium of the work of art: the thread that runs through the loom. The following year she expressly placed herself in the role of a work of art at a durational performance in the Museum of Fine Arts. With a woman's daintiness she composed herself into a perfect sight, a beautiful spectacle, and spent three days sitting/living in the empty place of a Goya painting on loan, behind a cordon, in the company of a security guard and the rest of the works of art. Equating a masterpiece and masterful female beauty, this performance inquired into the durability of the two kinds of value.

Next, Kele was invited to the Paris Biennial in 1980, where she planned to be auctioned as a work of art. She figured that through selling herself as a work of art, she would learn what she was worth, and armed with that knowledge, she would be better able to take control of her life. The bidders at the auction were selected from among respondents to a matrimonial ad she had published in the French daily paper, *Libération*. The translation of the original ad reads as follows: "Young and successful Eastern European female artist seeks gentleman for marriage. This marriage would enable her to freely move around and accompany her exhibitions to the West. In exchange accommodation in her home country and local art contacts are offered. Respond to the following address:------. Meetings possible after 10 July."

Some of the replies Kele received offered help out of comradeship and, rather than requesting a photo of the future bride, inquiring about her looks

15 Judit Kele, interview, Budapest, 28 December 2005, and Paris, 7 July 2009.

Figure 9.1.
Judit Kele, *I Am a Work of Art*, 1979–80. Installation view, Hartware Medienkustverein, 2010. © Mark Ansorg.

or any other personal details, the respondents communicated their own attitudes about the particular status of an Eastern European woman in Cold War Europe. These ranged from idle curiosity to appended quotes from Marx and Hegel, to intriguing narratives of proleftist cultural activism in France.[16]

16 Part of the corresponding letter from "Michel M., 27": "I work as a special needs teacher in the Dijon region. I write a lot and sometimes paint. We recently founded the Dijon branch of A.I.D.A. (International Agency for the Protection of Artists) and we are planning various events for the beginning of the semester. We managed to convene 300 people on our first evening in the spring for a reading of Vaclav Havel's texts, featuring Irina Breskine (I'm not sure about the correct spelling!) as a guest, and we also screened a film about Soviet nonconformist painting. There was also a reading of Laahbi's texts (Moroccan, dying in a prison of Hassan II), and classical music from Uruguay; latter country keeps one of its renowned musicians in prison. Five imprisoned or silenced artists in one night.

Selected respondents were then invited to bid to possess Kele: a work of art—at an auction. One bidder did purchase her for several years, and insisted on having his newly acquired "work of art" in his home. Kele thus had to be converted into an "international work of art," that is, one with a capacity for cross-border mobility, which at the time was only possible through marriage. Kele divorced her Hungarian husband, and a year or so later followed her new "owner" to the French capital, and remained "in his possession" until 1983.

Searching through Judit Kele's personal archive, some other documents turned up that seemed to have been largely forgotten, even by the artist herself. Such was the mimeographed program of the International Feminist Conference, organized in Belgrade in 1978, which listed Kele as a participant. Gender scholars from the former Yugoslavia take great pride today in having organized an event of such a scale as early as in 1978. The conference program features a truly impressive list of international participants, including such trailblazing feminist figures as Susan Sontag and Lucy Lippard representing the US, Simone de Beauvoir, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva invited from France, and, from England, Sheila Rowbotham and Juliet Mitchell. We learn, however, from Chiara Bonfiglioli's meticulous research, that all these prominent feminists had been sent invitations, but practically none of them attended, although there was a large number of international participants, mostly from Italy and France, and fewer from England, Hungary, Poland and West Germany.[17]

Kele also came across a few photos of a performance in which she and Katalin Ladik were fighting in and with mud. Again, Kele's memories are unreliable: she cannot decide whether the event took place in one of Budapest's baths or at Belgrade's Bitef festival that she also visited around the same time. The other participant, Katalin Ladik (b. 1942), lived in Novi Sad, Yugoslavia, at the time, but regularly came to Hungary to perform from the 1970s onward, and in 1992 she moved to Budapest.[18] Discovering Kele's joint

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Marriage can be about a lot of things, but this one would be a marriage of convenience above all, securing [your] liberty. I'm looking forward to the encounter. In the meantime let me assure you of my sympathy for the initiative."

17 Chiara Bonfiglioli, "Belgrade, 1978: Remembering the Conference 'Drugarica Zena. Zensko Pitanje—Novi Pristup?'/'Comrade Woman: The Women's Question: A New Approach?' Thirty Years After" (MA thesis, University of Utrecht, 2008). Unfortunately, Bonfiglioli's research or other local sources do not clarify why the prominent guests remained absent.

18 Katalin Ladik, interview, Budapest, 31 August 2008.

Figure 9.2.
Katalin Ladik, *Performance*, József Attila Cultural Center, Budapest 1970.
Courtesy of the artist.

performance with Ladik is interesting because, while performance genres were a preferred form of expression with international women artists around that time, hardly any women within the Budapest counterculture were seen in performances unless as nonagentic participants, quasi-props, in male-authored pieces. The sound performances of Katalin Ladik were a notable exception to this general picture, although her first appearance on the Hungarian unofficial scene in 1970 lastingly marred her reputation.[19] The performance was a quasi-shamanistic fertility ritual in which the performer (Ladik her-

19 Interview with Katalin Ladik, 2008, August 31 (Budapest). The recent special issue of *Ex Symposium* devoted to Ladik's work published one of the incriminating reviews (no. 72, 2010): 4.

self) recited her sound poetry pieces, accompanied them using rudimentary musical instruments and was dressed in a fur gown that revealed one of her breasts. While this piece perfectly fitted the profile of progressive art and theater festivals, such as Belgrade's Bitef, and was welcome in other Yugoslav cities, the event caused outrage in Budapest. It earned Ladik the epithet "the undressing poetess." At this time, as Ladik commented in our interview, one of the distinctive artistic features of the acclaimed Hungarian film director Miklós Jancsó was using stark naked female extras in his films without any apparent function. By contrast, a woman using her own body (in a clearly motivated way) was hardly tolerable.

Ladik's narration also disclosed the particularly gendered background story of a relatively well-known 1968 happening, *UFO*, featuring such prominent Hungarian avant-garde artists as Tamás Szentjóby and Miklós Erdély. It was on the occasion of this event that Ladik was first invited to meet members of the semi-official Budapest art scene. *UFO* is a dryly beautiful piece that was orchestrated to arrange a meeting for Ladik and Szentjóby, who had already been in professional contact, exchanging letters for a while then, but had never met. According to the script of the event, Ladik was to arrive in town and spend the night in a hotel, where the next morning she was going to get instructions from the receptionist concerning the whereabouts of the meeting. The message told her to follow a man with a dog, waiting for her across the street. The two drove silently to the Danube bank where they found Erdély and others engaged in inane activities, and a human figure wrapped in aluminum foil lying on the ground. Ladik was to unwrap the body—and thus meet her fellow artist, Szentjóby.

When recalling this happening, Ladik mentioned a peculiar difficulty that she as a female artist had repeatedly encountered and that some of my other respondents also described. Interpersonal relations in the private sphere often called for the subordination of women's professional aspirations to male artist partners, or such creative aspirations elicited male partners' professional jealousy. This proved to be a difficult situation to manage even for the exceptionally self-reliant Dóra Maurer, and led to actual divorces in Ladik's life. Ladik herself set the complex struggle with existential, artistic and social barriers she as a female artist has faced as a major motive structuring our interview. As the artist related, she was ready to enter a traditional marriage and

family relations, taking on the extra effort to produce creative work, but she very much resented her partners' jealousy of the little time she could devote to creating art, and she was not ready to accept infringements upon her creative freedom: the *UFO* incident, when she did go to Budapest despite her husband's disapproval, became a ground for divorce.

My inquiry set out to contribute to the creation of a less monolithic and more nuanced picture of the cultural history of the 1970s. The research disclosed channels through which knowledge about intellectual trends that were current at the time circulated, whereby it may help unhinge popular imaginations about hermetically isolated cultural landscapes behind the Iron Curtain. It also unearthed evidence that destabilizes a narrative according to which there was but one single token figure on the Hungarian scene at the time developing a genuine feminist perspective. Why is it, then, that we have had no art historical record or awareness of the existence and activities of these other women?

Apart from the conceptual and methodological limitations of the "discourse of lack" laid out in this article's introduction, i would suggest some further plausible reasons. None of these artists made feminist perspectives the single organizing principle of their artistic activity; with some, this interest was clearly transient. A number of these women left Hungary around the late 1970s and early 1980s, and therefore fell out of the scope of initial surveys inspired by feminist art history.[20] Also, once abroad, most of them continued their creative pursuit in other artistic fields.

The tableau i sketched here also shows that Hungarian women artists' at best tangential endorsement of feminist perspectives was only partly the result of a lack of awareness of feminist theories. In their reminiscences, the artists reported an internalized desire for, and a lived experience of, emancipation, especially when comparing their own life trajectories and opportunities with their mothers' generation, and this experience made it difficult for them to relate to Western feminist struggles. This said, i do not mean to deny the inner contradictions and even a degree of cognitive dissonance coming through their narratives, especially when the focus is shifted to interpersonal

20 Apart from persons mentioned in the text, I have been in contact with Marian Kiss (interview, Budapest, 2 January 2011), Júlia Veres (email communication, December 2010–April 2011) and Zsuzsa Forgács (interview, New York and Budapest, 2011).

relations, or the discrepancy between a nominal endorsement of equal rights and actual everyday practices—this is an intriguing subject worth following up in another paper.

And yet another reason for "aborted" feminist experimentations seems to have been the unreceptiveness of the strongly male-dominated, if not sexist counterculture. In this respect, the vanguard artistic circle of the period has to be regarded as to some degree regressive and exclusory insofar as it withheld the new possibilities that simultaneous social developments did offer for women.

Last but not least, a rewarding attainment of the research is that it brought back to light a superb art project. In 1985, Judit Kele stopped working as a visual artist and took to filmmaking. Her scarcely recorded works and performances, including *I Am a Work of Art* were practically forgotten and thus unknown to even local art historians. Kele's piece was reconstructed and first shown in the framework of the exhibition *Agents and Provocateurs*[21]—and today it already forms part of the collection of the Ludwig Museum Budapest.[22]

21 *Agents and Provocateurs*, Institute of Contemporary Art–Dunaujvaros, Hungary (October–November 2009), curated by Beata Hock and Franciska Zólyom, www.agentsandprovocateurs.net.

22 *Valami változás—Új szerzemények 2009–2011* [A change—New acquisitions, 2009–2011], 5 March–15 May 2011.

10

Heightened Alert: The Underground Art Scene in the Sights of the Secret Police—Surveillance Files as a Resource for Research into Artists' Activities in the Underground of the 1960s and 1970s

Kata Krasznahorkai

Groundbreaking conceptual and performance art, Fluxus, happenings, and Living Theater actions were taking place in a twilight atmosphere of semi-legality or illegality in Europe's communist countries of the 1960s and 1970s, at the same time as similar trends were developing in the West.

Scarce documentation, however, has made it difficult for art historians to cover these forms of artistic strategy, in particular, with available records often being based exclusively on the recollections of participating artists or audience members. Research into this era has still not adequately addressed the character and scope of transnational artistic exchange that occurred in the gray area of personal freedom under repressive regimes.

The reports from secret police spies infiltrated into underground art circles offer information that is essential to art historical research and not available elsewhere. Approached critically, these files offer information about the strategies chosen by artists about whether to network at the national level or to remain isolated, contact persons from the West as well as the East, resources from the West and their way through the Iron Curtain, the planning surrounding the events, printed materials (later confiscated), the locations of the

performances and exhibitions, and the number, age, profession, gender, and even clothing style of the members of the audience, who were often named. The documentation also offers insight into the secret police's methods and strategic argumentation regarding specific art forms and into the process of criminalization. The descriptions of a happening, performance, or Fluxus evening or the reports about certain groups commonly spanning years also document in unusual—and uncanny—detail the various developmental stages of individual initiatives and their transnational spread. One of the most important aims of these reports was to precisely identify the members and contact persons of this scene, which was classified as "extremely dangerous,"[1] and, most importantly, to eliminate the channels used to disseminate ideas.

The diligence and vehemence of the national and transnational surveillance ascribed an importance to art and the art scene as a whole that not only emphasized the power of the artistic underground and the avant-garde, but also presented their capability and their latent danger to the political system as being far greater than it probably was.

The following considerations will use the case of the Hungarian theater group Kassák Studio, which later became famous as Squat Theatre in New York City, to explore the potential and inherent risks of this valuable art historical resource and the high level of threat attributed to the art scene because of the authorities' intensive information gathering.

Banned in Budapest[2] was the title of a 1977 review by Mel Gussow, the influential *New York Times* theater critic, of a performance by a group of young Hungarian emigrants, who played havoc and caused confusion in the streets near the Chelsea Hotel. The confusion was sometimes quite legitimate, as when a man climbed out of a taxi in front of the group's "occupied" building in their piece *Pig! Child! Fire!* and aimed a pistol at a man standing across the street. The group developed some scenes from *Pig! Child! Fire!* before leaving Budapest, premiered the work in Rotterdam, and debuted as Squat Theatre with it in New York. This was a truly transnational piece of theater.

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1 Title of the binder No. O-16268/1 ("Horgászok") in the Állambiztonsági Hivatal Történeti Levéltára [Historical archive of the secret police], Budapest, 238–52, from a report by the agent with the alias Zoltán Pécsi, dated 10 January 1974, titled "Az együttes tevékénységének változása az 1969–73 as években" [Changes in the ensemble's activities in the years 1969 to 1973].

2 Mel Gussow, "Stage: Banned in Budapest: Squat Abuses West 23rd Street," *New York Times*, 17 November 1977.

New York City drivers did not let this street scene bother them, but it affected the theater critic all the more; he pointed out that Hungary had exiled the theater ensemble formed in Budapest in 1969 because it was "obscene" and "incited political misinterpretation." Gussow seemed to agree with this reasoning. He described the piece as "vicious, violent, lewd and tasteless" and "more revolting than it is revolutionary." According to the review, Squat Theatre was related to American experimental theater, but drew more likely on the tradition of the happening. The critic saw the essential characteristic of the happening and Squat Theatre as the involvement of the audience, describing its reactions as integrative components of the performance.

The Hungarian secret police agent working under the alias Zoltán Pécsi also identified the "direct interplay between actor and audience"[3] as key in his analytical description of the ensemble's early pieces in the fifteen-page summary from 1974 titled "Changes in the Ensemble's Activities from 1963 to 1973."

This report, which we will look at in detail, is an extraordinary document, actually an analysis drawing on a profound knowledge of the international and Hungarian cultural scene. It factually and analytically presents the history of the Kassák Studio theater, the predecessor of Squat Theatre, during its inception in Budapest. The report contains information that other sources offer only inadequately, if at all.

The report's extreme precision is mirrored in its chapters, which, among other things, divide the theater collective's history into three phases on the basis of its stylistic development from 1969 to 1973. The document systematically analyzes each of the stages in regard to the ensemble members, the type of artistic activity, the changes in style and cast, and the size and type of the audience for each of the relevant time periods, subsequently covering "structural changes in the pieces—the expansion of the instrument,"[4] the "impact and characteristics of the apartment-based theater situation—changes in audience size,"[5] and the "ensemble's contact to neo-avant-garde groups."[6] The group's special effects receive particular attention,[7] with section headings

3 Binder Nr. O-16268/1 ("Horgászok"), 238–52,
4 Ibid., paragraph 3/4
5 Ibid., paragraph 4/0.
6 Ibid., paragraph 5/0.
7 Ibid., paragraph 5/1.

such as "Obscenity in the pieces"[8] or "Different methods of representing violence in the pieces."[9]

The informant also mentions the characteristics of a happening and the "activation"[10] and "destabilization"[11] of the audience cited by Mel Gussow. This implies that Pécsi knew exactly what a happening was. He is in no way judging this art form from the West negatively, when he describes how the increasing criticism at the time of the type of performance in the West and its fall from fashion had influenced some of the ensemble members to later recognize the "extremely superficial and damaging and, above all, unsuccessful nature"[12] of these experiments. According to the agent, "appalling and drastic examples, such as painting the audience,"[13] were no longer being carried out at theater performances in the West and the report states that this knowledge also contributed to the Kassák Studio gradually removing such effects from its repertoire.

Pécsi informed himself in detail about the international theater scene; he also described, among other things, the biennial Festival Mondial du Théâtre (World Theatre Festival) in Nancy, France, which extended an invitation in 1971 to Péter Halász—the central figure in the Kassák Studio and the subsequent Squat Theatre—and his theater group. The Hungarian authorities did nothing to block the invitation. The evening before departure, Halász asked the troupe not to use the trip to emigrate, because doing so would damage the ensemble. He had no intention of leaving Hungary at the time; he had an officially authorized theater group and a legal rental agreement for the Kassák Studio, where the ensemble was allowed to perform publicly.

Robert Wilson's *Deafman's Glance*, which had its European premier in Nancy, was of great significance to the international theater scene and also marked a turning point for the Kassák Studio. The surveillance records recount how the Hungarian ensemble performed three pieces in Paris with great success, for which it was enthusiastically applauded in the French press

8 Ibid., paragraph 5/2.
9 Ibid., paragraph 1/3.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.

and awarded a prize for the best direction. The agent writes that he has no information about whether it was one prize of many or about its importance.[14] He commonly prefaced his report with an entry about whether the validity of the delivered information was based on his personal experience or was first-hand. For questionable information, he noted its "level of uncertainty"[15] in parenthesis, also including the investigators with points of reference regarding his sources and the need to follow up on them.

After Kassák Studio returned from France, the ensemble was offered the chance to perform a piece[16] conceived very much along the lines of Robert Wilson at a large, prestigious open-air stage in Budapest with 2,000 seats—probably because of the group's recent international success. Péter Halász directed the piece and György Kurtág Jr. composed its live musical accompaniment. At that time, the ensemble was anything but oppressed, forbidden, or illegal; the group also had no contact with other neo-avant-garde groups, not because it was unable to, but, according to reports, because it chose to keep to itself. To publicize the upcoming performance, the actors walked through Budapest's main shopping street with a huge seven-headed dragon, distributing flyers. The police informer later described this stunt as a "disruptive act that deliberately frightened and irritated passers-by for no reason whatsoever"[17] and as a sign of brutality. According to Pécsi, this was a first indication of the group's radicalization that would follow in 1972—and its turning away from a promising and legal career.

One of the report's most disturbing passages described the transition of an avant-garde theater, which the state had initially supported and later tolerated,[18] into illegality, a status that would become a key feature of this theater and contribute significantly to its stylistic and conceptual radicalization. But it is precisely this gray area that cannot be objectively reconstructed

14 For information on Nancy, see ibid., paragraph 1/1.

15 Ibid., first paragraph of the report, 238.

16 The piece was titled *Gyors változások, távoli tengerek és messzi tájak vonzásában, avagy egy sárkány zaklatott sikoltása, melyet elnyomott a villámcsapást követő mennydörgés a szó tibeti értelmében* [Quick changes, enchanted by remote seas and far lands, or the dragon's turbulent cry silenced by thunder following lightning, in the Tibetan sense of the word). It premiered under the direction of Péter Halász on 16 and 17 July 1971, at the Rózsavölgyi Parkszínpad in Budapest.

17 Binder Nr. O-16268/1 ("Horgászok"), paragraph 2/2

18 Ibid., paragraph 3.

from the memoirs of participants and friends, because illegality was reinterpreted retrospectively as an accolade and even as a prerequisite for all avant-garde activity. Pécsi, however, describes events in quite a different way:

> Although no one spoke in favor of giving up the theater work, it took the group members surprisingly long to come to terms with the fact of illegality. In consideration of later developments, the drawn-out attempts appear irrational and indicate that the group was in no way pervaded by some form of illegal, oppositional, "underground" ideology, that the status of illegality had struck the group entirely unprepared . . . and caused many members to have grave doubts, and this condition of being outside the law only established itself after some time and on account of various internal and external circumstances, or they adapted to the situation.[19]

Pécsi added a comment that Halász used all of his contacts and acquaintances in an attempt to be allowed to perform legally in another district or institute. The fact that Halász's father was an eminent lawyer and his mother-in-law held an upper-grade post with the state secret police in the 1950s implies that these contacts were not insignificant.

These efforts were unsuccessful and in the end Péter Halász's grandmother allowed the group to perform in her living room (also playing in one piece herself). This imposed illegal situation had far-reaching stylistic consequences and a decisive impact on this theater's character, with the "apartment theater" becoming its own genre, which after the group's emigration would become known in the international history of theater as "squat" or "occupied" apartment theater.

Pécsi recognized this potential as early as 1974, but in different terms, when he wrote:

> The rehearsals that took place in Halász's apartment made it seem as if an apartment could be the theater's home and also a place for its performances. This fundamental misunderstanding set off a long process, in which entirely private activities took place in front of the audience. . . . The pre-

19 Ibid., paragraph 3/1.

> sentation of such activities is contradictory and the consequences unpredictable, . . . damaging and therefore irresponsible. . . . The situation with the apartment theater did lead to the reassessment of the artistic means, spatial structure, and the actors' pattern of behavior, but a responsible overview of these processes did not develop.[20]

Adaptation to the increasingly difficult conditions during this phase also led to the emergence of other fundamental features of the later Squat Theatre, such as the pieces' undefined structure and improvisational nature, their mutual authorship and lack of assigned roles, the ensemble's isolation from other groups—including those considered neo-avant-garde, and especially the blurring of the boundaries between a piece of absurd theater and real life.

A special section of the report is dedicated to the obscenity and violence referenced in the earlier-cited *New York Times* article that ultimately would be used as grounds to exile the group.[21] Yet, at this point the agent seemed instead to soften the accusations of what in the end would serve as the main point of criticism. He interpreted the public obscenity as "special effects," which the group only employed "externally" to catch the audience's attention. Even though, as he wrote,

> some artists from the West defined the sex act per se as art . . . and substituted group sex for their pieces . . . and there were doubtless instances of group sex in Hungary—although I never witnessed the fact with my own eyes— . . . no sex act ever occurred in the ensemble pieces and I am completely convinced that none of the actors in the group could have performed such an act in public.[22]

Pécsi seriously questioned whether the simple imitation of obscene acts can be defined as obscenity, attempting thus to counter an accusation that was obviously known to him and the authorities' pet issue. In difficult cases, too, such as in *King Kong*, when Halász, positioned as the penis of the huge

20 Ibid.
21 Ibid., paragraph 5/1 und 5/2.
22 Ibid., paragraph 5/1.

ape, kisses a woman and recites a Blake monologue, the informer sought to interpret the action instead as "disgusting" and as only an imitation or insinuation of obscenity.

Both the content and style of the analysis suggest that it was written by an educated person informed about the artistic processes, who obviously enjoyed delivering a text more in the style of theater critic.

This informant is one of the few whose identity was disclosed in the period after 1989. It emerged that the man with the alias Zoltán Pécsi was known to his friends as László Algol and belonged to the innermost circle of the—in his words—isolationist Halász group. It is also known that he sometimes wrote texts for the theater group and also performed in two of its pieces—which he then panned in his report. The highly intelligent man with the triple identity—who was mainly interested in cybernetics, supported himself with winnings from radio quiz shows on culture, was very knowledgeable about music as well as about bus and train schedules according to his friends, and also wrote mystical poems—could scarcely get published at the time and appeased his passion formulating analytical reports, which subsequently have become the most valuable source on the history of the beginnings of Squat Theatre, among other things. The bulk of his reports were destroyed in 1989. Some years later an acquaintance recognized the voice of a caller on a radio quiz show, who correctly answered all the questions and identified himself as Gustav Habermann, that is as László Algol, the informant known as Pécsi. Algol-Habermann-Pécsi now lives in New Zealand, where he is a professor of psychology living under the name Gustav Habermann. In his letter of apology to his former friends, he wrote that he had informed out of conviction. He thought that his reports would open new channels of communication between authorities and the independent young artists and help new artistic initiatives—which would also serve to justify his zeal.

The report outlined earlier is located in a compilation dossier titled "Fisherman."[23] From it, we gain not only a detailed description of even the period's smallest underground groups, but also a picture of how the interior ministry's orders were implemented and of the domestic counterintelligence's efforts to expose and dismantle transnational cultural networks.

23 "Halász" means fisherman in Hungarian.

The documents were compiled by the department that ultimately coordinated the surveillance of this group. Summaries, analyses, and operational plans for further courses of action were drawn up regularly, with the aforementioned Pécsi report being one of them. No concrete argument existed to arrest the Kassák Studio on political grounds, because the witnesses or informants questioned or debriefed did not understand the theater pieces and thus could also not provide any evidence for use against them. The informant Pécsi must, therefore, have been one of the agency's most important sources; he was classified as extremely diligent and operationally valuable, with a comment added that his talent might also make him useful in political cases. Nonetheless, the authorities were unable to criminally implicate the Halász group.

The members of the group were placed under strict surveillance officially because of "participation in a group of young people that represents a danger to society,"[24] with the relevant dossier being marked "Top Secret! Very Important—Heightened Alert." More and more agents were appointed for surveillance, all telephones were tapped, and reports were filed on every performance—with the Kassák Studio alone producing fifty performances from 1972 to 1976. The Polish secret police were also called into action on the occasion of the group's unauthorized performance at the theater festival in Warsaw in 1973, which led to the participants having their passports revoked.

As an emergency remedy for the resulting impasse, the entire group was granted a one-way tourist visa to Paris in place of their once-again rejected emigration application, and left the country on 20 January 1976. After a year-long exodus through Paris, Düsseldorf, Rotterdam, and England, the entire group was able to settle in New York City. The original lineup of the Squat Theatre rented the three floors on West 23rd St. as a theater family, living and working there with great success until the mid-1980s. The Hungarians closed their dossier on the Kassák Studio in 1976. At the time, the members of the theater were all in their early thirties.[25] Between 1973 and 1976, the state security apparatus was observing some 900 persons in the "cultural sphere," as many as 1,600 to 1,800 persons if their contacts are in-

24 See footnote 1.

25 Algol/Habermann/Pécsi delivered reports as late as 1983 on a person who wanted to create a Squat Theatre Archive.

cluded, most of whom were less than thirty years old. In 1970 the interior ministry established a special unit within its domestic counterintelligence section to carry out surveillance of the cultural sphere, expanding its observation to include the youth in 1973. Its observation of these groups continued until 1989. This enormous logistical, material, bureaucratic, and staffing effort by national and transnational security forces was aimed at a threat that the state considered to be imminent, domestically and internationally: "the enemy elements attacking on the cultural level," as an interior ministry directive put it in 1970. This order claimed that "the external and internal enemy forces attack first and foremost on the cultural level . . . which makes it necessary to plant particularly qualified persons who are able to carry out far-reaching investigations."[26]

This paranoid fear of art, culture, and youth, however, served to leave behind reports, which—though generally not in Pécsi's style—do provide descriptions of these events that are detailed and at least occasionally objective, and, less commonly, photographs. These documents provide information, untarnished by heroic sagas and myth-making, with which we can reconstruct the underground movement that existed in communist Europe, information otherwise only available from other sources in a distorted form—if at all. The reports from the state security informants are only viable as research resources, however, once historians have decoded their system and language, challenged their assertions, and examined the individual events using comparative and systematic source analysis. The documents' high level of misinformation, imprecision, or intentional misinterpretation complicate their use as reliable sources.

The alleged internal and external attack, which led to the cited measures against the "youth culture," also served as a catalyst for many of these avant-garde experiments. As we attempted to illustrate using the example of Squat Theatre's beginnings, it was often precisely these worsening conditions that forced an artistic alliance with no prior intention of illegal activity or internationality into the underground and later into exile. The state's policy of exclusion compelled the artists to radicalize and expand their artistic language and form of expression. It thus—unintentionally—promoted the process.

26 Ibid., 169.

Squat Theatre's fundamental concept of actually implementing the avant-garde's risky utopian dream of abolishing all boundaries between life and art also stemmed from the theater group having had to adapt real life to an absurd theater piece, which was what the ensemble experienced immediately after it was forced underground. The international theater scene responded euphorically to this new form of theater. Jim Jarmusch, Jonathan Demme, and Rainer Werner Fassbinder refer to Squat as one their most important creative influences. Nico and the New York avant-garde regularly visited Squat Theatre. *Theater Heute* published several articles about the theater's performances, referring to it also as *Westkunst* (West art),[27] because of the fascination that this form of theater evoked in the West's theater scene. It was captivated by the radicalism, courage, and unconditional, uncompromising commitment to artistic freedom. These, then, were the fundamental elements of art in the West, but they would never have come to fruition without the experience of repression and life in the "East." A modern chronicling of the interaction of art and geography in this era requires new sources—such as the secret police dossiers—if it is to provide a more nuanced view of the impact of particular political situations on style and the emergence of strategies based on reciprocal influence of the art scenes in the East and West.

27 Peter von Becker, "Westkunst. Das Squat Theatre spielt 'Mr. Dead and Mrs. Free,'" *Theater Heute* 8 (1981): 6–7.

II

Remapping Socialist Realism: Renato Guttuso in Poland

Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius

A call for papers, issued for the "Socialist Realism and World Literary History" panel at the recent Annual Conference of the American Comparative Literature Association, held in Vancouver in April 2011, claimed boldly:

> Our goal is to argue for socialist realism as a global culturo-aesthetic phenomenon by extending it beyond its original geographic base in Eastern Europe and away from its historically proscribed reputation as a propaganda machine. . . . Socialist realism is not dead, even if it long ago ceased to be dominant in Eastern Europe. Its principles and aesthetic norms continue to be exercised in various ways today, just as they were long before the term "socialist realism" was coined. . . . We are looking for art and aesthetic theory from unexpected times and places that complicate our definitions of "political" or "committed" art and that challenge us—precisely from a world-literary stance—to renegotiate the relationships between art and propaganda, between artistic and political practice, and among Left-cultural movements alive globally in the past and today.[1]

1 The panel was organized by Sarah E. Pickle and Ryan Culpepper, http://www.acla.org/acla2011/?p=628 (accessed 30 December 2010).

The agency in the process of rethinking socialist realism as a global occurrence of politically engaged art, set against its usual reduction to a "red contagion" spread from Moscow, and as such doomed to oblivion, has been taken over here by literary scholars. From a world-art stance, however, significant new steps toward the critical reappraisal of socialist realism and its geography had already been proposed by a number of scholars, including Boris Groys, David Craven, and Julia Andrews, focusing on the former Soviet Union, as well as Mexico and China.[2] For my own part, I was arguing for wider recognition to be given to the cultural hybridization between East and West during the period of the Cold War, and especially to the role played by the Western left in the process of the legitimization of socialist realism in East-Central Europe. Socialist realism, I claimed, might have been imposed onto the European People's Democracies by Moscow, but it was validated, at least in Warsaw, via Paris, Rome and Mexico.[3] This assertion was prompted by my "discovery" of a group of paintings by Western communist artists, which had been buried in the storage of the Warsaw National Museum since the 1950s. It included works by the most prominent warriors of the left, active in Italy and France, such as Renato Guttuso, Gabriele Mucchi, Giuseppe Zigaina, and Armando Pizzinato, as well as by André Fougeron and Boris Taslitzky.[4] While forgotten and ignored in Poland, the same artists were attracting considerable attention from scholars and curators in the West, and were exhibited in major art galleries, such as Whitechapel or Tate Modern in London.[5] Clearly, there were two separate narratives of realist art in the service of the Communist Party: a "heroic" one and a "criminal" one. The first had been developing within a stream of radical art history in the West, stressing social

2 Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and beyond* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); David Craven, *Art and Revolution in Latin America, 1910–1990* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002); Julia F. Andrews, *Painters and Politics in the People's Republic of China, 1949–1979* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

3 Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius, "How the West Corroborated Socialist Realism in the East: Fougeron, Taslitzky and Picasso in Warsaw," *Biuletyn Historii Sztuki* 65:2 (2003): 303–329. For a similar argument recently, from the perspective of East Germany, see Jérôme Bazin, "Le réalisme socialiste et ses modèles internationaux," *Vingtième siècle: Revue d'histoire* 109 (2011): 72–87.

4 This group also included paintings by Giuseppe Santomaso, Massimo Campigli, Barbaro Saverio, Bernard Lorjou, Paul Rebeyrolle, the Croatian Franjo Likar, the Serbian Stojan Čelić, the Mexicans Ignazio Aquirre, Jeronimo Mateo and Naya Marquez, the Cuban Carmelo González, and the Indian artists Maqbool Fida Husain, Badri Narayan, Kattingeri Krishna Hebbar, and Vishnu Chinchalkar.

5 Cf. *Guttuso* (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 1996) and the Art of Commitment room, with labels and texts by Matthew Gale, set up c. 2000 within the display theme History/Memory/Society at Tate Modern.

and political concern, antifascism and the anti-imperialist stance of Western communist art. The second, no doubt informed by the East-Central European experience of political captivity, denied all "artness" to socialist realist productions, and either condemned or mocked their social and political commitment as nothing but a sign of subjugation to the totalitarian reign.

Since the publication of my article, some of those works forgotten in the storage of the National Museum in Warsaw were carefully restored and included in a quasi-permanent display of art post-1945, set up in 2007. By accompanying Polish iconic images of the era, the paintings by Fougeron, Guttuso and Mucchi were now given a chance to testify to their role in the formation of the socialist realist art world in Poland.[6] In this text, I want to return to this topic, focusing now less on the works themselves, and more on the mechanisms of artistic exchange, on the ways in which the networks of politically committed artists were manufactured in Europe at the end of the 1940s. Clearly, the most prominent role in the process of the cultural rapprochement between the Cold War political and cultural camps was played by Pablo Picasso, and the instrumentalization of his persona by the communist propaganda machine has recently generated considerable scholarly interest.[7] At the same time, the impact made by other artists of the Western left in Eastern Europe remains relatively unexplored. If my first article paid special attention to André Fougeron, the leading artist of the French Communist Party, this text takes a closer look at Renato Guttuso, called by Theodor Adorno "the major representative of Italian socialist realism,"[8] and the author of two paintings in the collections of the National Museum in Warsaw. Interestingly, neither of them had been widely accessible to the public before 2007, and, as I want to argue, it was Guttuso's other forms of presence in the art world of communist Poland that proved more significant for the legitimization of socialist realism.

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6 They are reproduced in the exhibition guide edited by Katarzyna Nowakowska Sito, *Przewodnik*: *Galeria Sztuki XX wieku 1945–1955/Guide: Gallery of 20th Century Art* (Warsaw: The National Museum in Warsaw, 2007).

7 Gertje R. Utley, *Picasso: The Communist Years* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000); Piotr Bernatowicz and Vojtěch Lahoda, "Picasso and Central Europe after 1945," in *Picasso: Peace and Freedom*, ed. Lynda Morris and Christoph Grunenberg (Tate Liverpool, London: Tate Publishing, 2010), 44–51.

8 Quoted from *Renato Guttuso: Passione e realtà* (Parma: La Fondazione Magnani Rocca, 2010), http://www.artlynow.com/blog/2010/mostra-renato-guttuso-pittore-artista/ (accessed 30 December 2010).

Renato Guttuso holds a privileged status in Italy—with his art not only being discussed by art historians and critics, who keep comparing him to Michelangelo, Caravaggio and Picasso, but also widely written about by Italian intellectuals, including Alberto Moravia, Pier Paolo Pasolini and Andrea Camilleri.[9] A founder of the Fronte nuovo delle arti, and a member of the Central Committee of the Italian Communist Party from 1951, Guttuso was held to be the true model of the artist-activist, passionately believing in his function and mission, in society. For him, realism—unpolished, impatient and uncompromised—was the only form of artistic expression offering the alternative for the illegibility of modernism. In the words of Guttuso's first Western monographer John Berger: "Sustained by a binding faith in his fellow men, he . . . has understood that the artist's responsibility is not only for what his brush does to his canvas, but also for what his canvas does to those who gaze at it."[10]

If Guttuso's reputation in Western Europe and America in the 1950s was limited because of his deliberate incompatibility with fashionable forms of modernism, and because of reservations toward his politics,[11] his career in People's Democracies flourished. Seized by the machinery of the propaganda and listed, next to Fougeron, Leopoldo Mendez, Willi Gropper, and Rockwell Kent, as one of the "progressive artists of the capitalist countries," who were unmasking the true face of imperialism and the decadence of modernism as its tool, Guttuso became the bearer of the gaze of the Western communist, facilitating the approval of socialist realism's political aims and its realist idiom.[12] Between the 1950s and the 1970s, the total number of exhibitions, catalogs, and monographs of Guttuso, published in Moscow, Leipzig, Berlin, Prague, Budapest, Bucharest and Warsaw outweighed the attention given to him in the West, and almost competed with the publicity he received in his native Italy.[13] He was also awarded several state honors within the Com-

9 A selection of literature on Guttuso is given by the website Archivi Guttuso, http://www.guttuso.com/en/main_old.htm (accessed 30 December 2010). Guttuso's *Battle of the Ponte dell'Ammiraglio* was recently acquired by the Uffizi for €750,000. See Antonio Natali, *Guttuso agli Uffizi* (Firenze: Edizioni Polistampa, 2005).

10 John Berger, *Renato Guttuso* (London: Leicester Galleries, 1955), 6.

11 James Hyman, "A 'Pioneer Painter': Renato Guttuso and Realism in Britain," in *Guttuso* (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 1996), 39–53.

12 "An Open Letter of Polish Artists to Fellow Artists Abroad" and "An Open letter of the Soviet Artists to the Artists of the World," both published in *Przegląd Artystyczny* 7–9 (1950): 3–5.

13 Cf. bibliographies in Enrico Crispolti, *Catalogo ragionato generale dei dipinti di Renato Guttuso* (Milan: Giorgio Mondadori & Associati, 1983), vols. 1–3; also *Guttuso* (1996), 165–67.

munist Bloc, including membership of the Deutsche Akademie der Künste in Berlin (from 1955), several state prizes, and the most prominent of all of them, the International Lenin Peace Prize, given to him during his grand retrospective in Moscow in 1972. And yet, Guttuso's ubiquitous presence in Eastern Europe has not attracted scholarly attention so far, remaining a blind spot in the literature on the artist.[14]

Guttuso's eventful career behind the Iron Curtain began with his participation in the International Congress of Intellectuals in Defense of Peace. Held in Wrocław in 1948, it was a seminal event in the process of establishing an international network of politically committed artists, writers, scientists, and academics from all over the globe. Although it is said to have fixed the Cold War binaries, aligning modernism and freedom with the West, and mindless submission to Stalinist realism and totalitarian oppression with the East, yet, it is precisely the Wrocław Congress, with a range of accompanying events, and its long-standing repercussions for the Cold War cultures, which calls into question the established narratives of art post-1945.[15] It assembled almost 500 intellectuals and luminaries in the sciences and politics, including Irène Joliot-Curie, Julian Huxley, J. P. Bernal, A. J. P. Taylor, and George Lukács; the poets and novelists Paul Eluard, Ilya Ehrenburg, Jorge Amado, Aimé Césaire, Max Frisch, and Anna Seghers; and artists such as Pablo Picasso, Fernand Léger, Leopoldo Mendez, and Feliks Topolski. Guttuso was appointed one of the four presidents of the congress. He did not give an official paper, but made himself known as an ardent promoter of realism, as expressed in a conversation with the French journalist Dominique Desanti, during which he pinned down Picasso, while praising the congress enthusiastically for opening contacts with the "democratic forces of the world."[16]

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14 Bogdan Klechowski, "Renato Guttuso—różne oblicza realizmu," *Zeszty Naukowo-Artstyczne Wydziału Malarstwa*, ASP Kraków (2006): 13–36, which discusses the reception of Guttuso in Europe, ignoring Poland altogether. On the reception of Guttuso in East Germany, see Bazin, "Le réalisme socialiste."

15 Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius, "Modernism between Peace and Freedom: Picasso and Others at the Congress of Intellectuals in Wrocław, 1948," in *Cold War Modern: Design 1945–1970*, ed. David Crowley and Jane Pavitt (London: V & A Publishing, 2008), 33–41. Guttuso's drawing *Le rovine di Wroclaw gridano al mondo: Pace!* was published in *L'Unità*, on 28 October 1948.

16 "Je ne crois pas que Picasso doive continuer dans sa voie. Il ne semble pas le désirer d'ailleurs d'après ce qu'il nous disait l'autre soir. . . . Il m'a fallu venir à Wroclaw pour voir clair en moi. Pour moi, ce Congrès a quelque chose de magique. C'est une révélation. Mon premier contact avec les forces démocratiques du monde. J'ai rencontré des artistes étrangers en Italie depuis la Libération, mai pas 500 intellectuels de 45 pays, pas Picasso et Fernand Léger. Et puis, je ne connaissais les Soviétiques que par ouï-dire. Maintenant je peux par-

The contacts made by Guttuso in Wrocław turned out to be very fruitful indeed for establishing his fame in the Communist Bloc, including Poland, but it is difficult to ascertain today whether he visited this country at all again. Guttuso's presence in Poland—before his large retrospective in 1954—was mostly expressed through his written statements, translations of his texts, as well as reproductions rather than through his paintings or further personal encounters. Unlike fellow communist Picasso—who was not in the habit of writing articles on art policies, nor was he inclined to vilify formalism—Guttuso was the artist-activist, as capable with his brush as with a pen. His radical declarations, delivered in a sharp rhetoric of militant Communism, aptly served the task of defining the vices of "antiformalism" and the virtues of "realism." Often quoted or paraphrased in *Przegląd Artystyczny* (The arts review), the major doctrinaire art periodical in Poland, Guttuso's statements, turned into slogans, were heavily instrumentalized in a wide-ranging campaign for a wholesale conversion of all Polish arts into socialist realism.

A typical example was an anonymous piece introducing Guttuso as an exemplary "Artist as the Peace Fighter" published in the autumn of 1950 in a special issue of *Przegląd Artystyczny* produced just in time for the Second World Peace Congress in Warsaw, in a section devoted to "progressive artists" in capitalist countries. It all began from Guttuso's own declaration, quoted without references, equating art, in a truly avant-garde way, with the task of rebuilding the world: "I am an artist and a communist. In my mind, both of those terms are inseparable. I deeply believe that art is one of the tools for the transformation of contemporary reality and serves the struggle for a better future of humankind."[17] What followed was a blunt profile of Guttuso as a "Peace Warrior," fully committed to the struggle against "abstraction and other versions of formalist movements of bourgeois art, including the decadent tendencies in his own work." To complete this characteristic of a paradigmatic communist artist, it also included the assertion of Guttuso's debt to Soviet art, the claim that was to be subsequently vigorously denied by the

ler, prendre contact. Je sais maintenant que nous, jeunes artistes italiens, avions raison de supposer que la paix et la démocratie valaient qu'on lutte pour elles." Dominique Desanti, *Nous avons choisi la paix* (Paris: Pierre Seghers, 1949), 111–13.

17 "Artysta bojownikiem o pokój," *Przegląd Artystyczny* 7–9 (1950): 12. The next piece, *On a New Way*, was devoted to French communist artists. Ibid., 13–15.

artist himself.[18] This brief text of half a page must have served as the recommendation of Guttuso to the Peace Prize, which he was to receive during the Warsaw Peace Congress.[19] It was illustrated with a reproduction of one of his largest paintings, the *Occupation of Uncultivated Lands in Sicily* (1949–50), acquired by the Deutsche Akademie der Künste in Berlin. It is likely that an oil sketch to this composition, with a peasant waving a red flag, in the collections of the National Museum in Warsaw, was presented as a gift from the artist to the Polish authorities on the occasion of his first World Peace Prize award.[20] The sketch, broadly painted and bearing all the features of violent expressionism, could not possibly have been classified as keeping within the antiformalist frame of socialist realism and, apparently, was kept away from the public until the 1960s.

In spite of the obvious gap between Guttuso's verbal definitions of realism and his own use of the idiom, or, in other words, between Guttuso as constructed by *Przegląd Artystyczny* and Guttuso as defined by his paintings, he was soon commissioned to illustrate a novel by the Polish author Julian Stryjkowski, *Running to Fragalà*, which described the post-WWII revolutionary revolts in Sicily. The standards of the socialist realist *fini* expected from its painting were much more relaxed for lesser media, including also book illustrations, thus Guttuso's drawings, executed in much the same abrupt manner, must have been accepted without any major reservations. The novel, first issued in 1951, was republished twice, each time in a new graphic layout, earning the artist another Polish prize, awarded by the state in 1952.[21] On this particular occasion, *Przegląd Artystyczny* included Guttuso's article, "On the Way to Realism" (1952), which had first appeared in the Italian communist journal *Società*.[22] It argued strongly, even if in a circular fashion, for the unconditional demise of formalism for the sake of the courageous ges-

18 "How and how much I have tried to work from reality and how different was and is my search from the flat and illustrative mannerism of the Soviets and of the so-called French realists, should have been obvious to everyone," said Guttuso in conversation with the American critic James Thrall Soby, in *Guttuso* (New York: ACA Gallery—Heller Gallery, 1958): 3–4.

19 On the Warsaw Peace Congress, see Phillip Deery, "*The Dove Flies East: Whitehall, Warsaw and the 1950 World Peace Congress," Australian Journal of Politics & History* 48:4 (2002): 449–68.

20 *In Calabria*, 72.5 x 96 cm, signed "Guttuso '50" and described on the reverse: "Guttuso Studio per un quadro sull'occupazione di terre in Calabria"; Crispolti, *Catalogo ragionato*, vol. 1, cat. no. 50/67.

21 "Renato Guttuso," *Przegląd Artystyczny* 4 (1952): 61.

22 Renato Guttuso, "Na drodze do realizmu," *Przegląd Artystyczny* 4 (1954): 52–60.

ture of realism. "Realism is not a school, not a period in the history of art, ... but a permanent factor in all its periods of enhancing the vitality of art after the period of stylization, ossification, decadence," claimed Guttuso, moving onto a merciless vivisection of the modernist search for the autonomy of art, which—even if first motivated by the rejection of nineteenth-century academicism—soon established its own academic repertory of motifs, "releasing a rotten smell and the dust of plaster among guitars and plates with fruit."[23] The major charge against modernism was that it "cut itself off from the public, the ordinary viewer, the man from the street, be it a bourgeois or a proletarian." In contrast, "the artists moving along the path of realism believe that a work of art should be understandable for all, at least partly. . . . This aspect of the work commonly accessible is its contents."[24]

Guttuso's arguments, metaphors and judgments kept influencing Polish art criticism until the end of the socialist realist hegemony in Poland. For instance, the phrases from his review of the 1954 Venice Biennale—in which he unmasked surrealism as a "glorification of low pornography of a certain Delvaux," as well as condemning Mirò for "giving up to a refined and cheap caprice"—were almost mirrored in another report on the Biennale in the same issue, written by Juliusz Starzyński, the chief "ideologue" of art politics of the time. He also complained about a "distasteful pornography" of Delvaux, as well as the "frivolity and coquettishness" of Mirò.[25] Interestingly, Guttuso's review opened from the reproduction of his own *Boogie-woogie*, shown at the Biennale, a composition that must have been devised by him to prove the superiority of the immediacy of realism over abstraction. It represented an animated group of young people (in fact his fellow artists) enjoying the pleasures of the American dance, while a lifeless image of Mondrian's abstract interpretation of boogie-woogie hangs neglected on a wall at the back.[26] It is hardly possible to assess today whether the wit of Guttuso's visual argument was grasped by the *Przegląd Artystyczny*'s readers, but its power seems to have been undermined by reproductions of the very paintings he mocked in his re-

23 Guttuso, "Na drodze do realizmu," 52.

24 Ibid., 58.

25 Renato Guttuso, "Jarmark snobizmu (W związku z XXVII Biennale)," *Przegląd Artystyczny* 5–6 (1954): 31–42; Juliusz Starzyński, "Internacjonalizm czy kosmopolityzm (Kilka uwag z powodu XXVII Biennale w Wenecji)," *Przegląd Artystyczny* 5–6 (1954): 3–26.

26 Guttuso, "Jarmark snobizmu," 31.

RENATO GUTTUSO (Włochy). „Boogie woogie" w Rzymie. Olej, 1953

JARMARK SNOBIZMU

(W związku z XXVII Biennale)

RENATO GUTTUSO

Wenecka Biennale od chwili powstania posiadała zawsze charakter uroczysty i oficjalny. Wystawa ta, będąca dziś może najważniejszym przeglądem artystycznym na świecie dzięki liczbie narodowości biorących w niej udział (i dzięki oficjalności tego udziału), jest przedmiotem uwagi każdego, kto pragnie mieć ogólne pojęcie o sztuce światowej, stanowi bowiem jej obiektywny przegląd, nawet jeśli nie można nazwać obiektywnym ani ogólnego założenia, ani selekcji dokonywanej przez większą część uczestniczących w Biennale narodowości.

Nieobecność Związku Radzieckiego i Chin Ludowych stanowi poważną lukę w wystawie nie tylko dlatego, że chodzi o dwa wielkie narody kulturalnie autonomiczne, ale również dlatego, że ze strukturą społeczną i nadbudową kulturalną tych krajów związana jest nowa ideologia; zbadanie sztuki tych krajów stanowiłoby jeden z głównych punktów referatu dla krytycznej dyskusji, która miałaby na celu zdanie sobie sprawy z pozytywnych i negatywnych aspektów sztuki, czerpiącej natchnienie z nowoczesnej socjalistycznej rzeczywistości w zestawieniu z szeroko reprezentowaną na wystawie sztuką Zachodu. Bylibyśmy radzi, aby nastąpiło to na przyszłej wystawie i żeby można było obejrzeć wystawę sztuki radzieckiej w całym procesie jej rozwoju od początków do dnia dzisiejszego, świadczącym o stoczonych walkach kulturalnych, o błędach i postępie, o zdobyczach.

Na początku była mowa o oficjalnym charakterze Biennale od chwili jej narodzin. Jeśli spojrzeć na nazwiska pierwszego Międzynarodowego Komitetu (1895), to znajdą się tam najbardziej „udekorowa-

31

Figure 11.1.
Opening page of Guttuso's article "Vanity Fair" in *Przegląd Artystyczny*, 1954.

view, by Mirò, Delvaux, Max Ernst, Hans Arp, Magritte, and others. As it happened, by summer 1954, orthodox socialist realism was already losing its hegemony in Poland, and the reproductions of those castigated works of art were offering a chance to spy on the forbidden, and much tempting, fruit of Western modernism.

And yet, despite the vanishing power of socialist realist verbal rhetoric, when Guttuso's works were finally brought to Poland and seen, the energy and immediacy of his visual language were not lost on the viewers. His exhibition—which toured at least six Eastern European cities, and included several of his large compositions, such as the *Battle for the Ponte Ammiraglio*—was staged to huge acclaim at the Central Exhibition Office Zachęta in Warsaw and later in Katowice (known as Stalinogród at the time). Comparing him with his Polish contemporaries, the young art historian Ryszard Stanisławski, who curated the show, wrote in *Przegląd Artystyczny*: "Guttuso is undoubtedly more colorful, more dynamic, more passionate and courageous in his painterly choices."[27] Even thirty years later, Guttuso's art was remembered by the critics as a much more agreeable alternative to the Soviet formula of artistic correctness, and mentioned among the remarks on the impact of French figuralists and the vitality of Mexicans.[28]

Considering this success, it comes as a surprise that one of Guttuso's largest compositions, the seductively colorful *Calabrians at the Piazza di Spagna* (1952),[29] which was shown in Warsaw and acquired by the Polish Ministry of Art and Culture after its long tour through Prague, Budapest, Bucharest, and Sofia, has remained a little-known piece in the artist's œuvre (Plate 11.1). In the catalogue raisonné of Guttuso's paintings by Enrico Crispolti, it is labeled as the *Immigrati a Roma*, a title that emphasizes the work's critical edge, and is classified as one of the most mature accomplishments of "'il realismo socialista' guttusiano," paying attention to the drama of contemporary people. In Crispolti's words, this stage, revealing some tangential points with the Zhdanovian formulas of socialist realism, was characterized by the precision of

27 Ryszard Stanisławski, *Wystawa prac Renato Guttuso* (Warsaw: Zachęta, 1954); Ryszard Stanisławski, "Guttuso—Malarz ludu włoskiego," *Przegląd Artystyczny* 3 (1954): 46–53; Marek Meschnik, *Biuro Wystaw Artystycznych w Katowicach: 1949–1999* (Katowice: Galeria Sztuki Współczesnej BWA, 2001), 79.

28 Elżbieta Grabska, "'Puisque realisme il y a,' czyli o tym co w sztuce powojennego dziesięciolecia nie mogło się dokonać," in *Sztuka polska po 1945 roku* (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1987), 375–384.

29 *Calabresi a Piazza di Spagna*, 1952, 233.5 x 144 cm, signed and dated 'Guttuso 52.'

the detail, descriptiveness, a certain emotionalism, and above all, by the documentary drive, the imperative to record the events of the artist's time in the visual language, simple and unadorned, and immediately communicative.[30] As he adds, this particular phase was marked by the debates about the presence of Italian realism at the 1952 Venice Biennale, and corresponded closely with views expressed by Guttuso in his article on realism, which, as I mentioned above, was republished in Poland. And indeed, the painting strikes one as the most paradigmatic "socialist realist" work by Guttuso, the closest to his profile constructed by *Przegląd Artystyczny*, representing "the reality of the poorly dressed,"[31] whose life-size bodies occupy almost the whole canvas. In fact, the painting derives its message from the contrast between the plain and worn out clothes of the working-class family from the Italian south, arriving in search of work in the center of Rome—and the affluent lifestyles promoted by the capital, where young people, fashionably dressed, have apparently nothing else to do but sit and converse on the Spanish steps. The empathy with, and the elevation of, the underprivileged, the scorn for the "chattering classes," as well as the expressiveness of the bodies and bold colors show similarities to the ways in which the Soviet formula of socialist realism was at the same time "personalized" by the Polish artist Andrzej Wróblewski.[32] Like Guttuso, he believed in the social function of art and in the imperative of its legibility, while not renouncing the expressive potential of the modernist flatness and of form itself. Although the links between the artists have been recently made into a topic worthy of investigation by Polish curators, the importance of the *Calabrians at the Piazza di Spagna* for the international socialist realist movement is still to be discussed.

A separate study of Guttuso's career in the Communist Bloc as a whole, forming an interesting example of the porosity of the Cold War boundaries in Europe and confirming the transnationality of socialist realism, is clearly needed. That, in turn, engenders the project to remap socialist realism, acknowledging its presence, its legacy and its persistence in various countries,

30 Crispolti, *Catalogo ragionato*, vol. 1, pp. ccxvii–ccxviii, cat. No. 52/7.

31 Guttuso, "Na drodze do realizmu," 57.

32 On the relationship between Guttuso and Wróblewski, see Nowakowska-Sito, *Przewodnik*, 50, and Joanna Kordjak-Piotrowska, *Andrzej Wróblewski* 1927–1957: W *50. rocznicę śmierci artysty* (Warsaw: The National Museum, 2007). For interesting remarks on Polish Socialist Realism, see Renato Guttuso, *Mestiere di pittore: Scritti sull'arte e la società* (Bari: De Donato, 1972), 253–55.

various regimes and at various times, all over the globe. So far, attempts have been made to map out, as well as to write about, the avant-garde in Eastern Europe. The East.Art.Map project by Irwin, as well as Piotr Piotrowski's seminal book on the Eastern European avant-garde, are significant achievements in this field.[33] What has not been done yet is to rewrite and remap the other side of the avant-garde, the major and most effective artistic idiom for this geographical area, the movement that contributed just as much to the construction of Eastern Europe as a region.

33 http://www.e-flux.com/projects/eastartmap/index.html (accessed 30 December 2010); Piotr Piotrowski, *In the Shadow of Yalta: Art and the Avant-garde in Eastern Europe 1945–1989* (London: Reaktion, 2009).

12

Picasso behind the Iron Curtain: From the History of the Postwar Reception of Pablo Picasso in East-Central Europe

Piotr Bernatowicz

In postliberation Paris, Picasso became the symbol of regained freedom. The artist owed much of his popularity among the Parisians to the fact that he refused to emigrate when many French modernists had fled to America.[1] Picasso's relationship with France reached its high point in the special exhibition accompanying the Salon d'Automne in 1944, known as the Liberation Salon, which was usually reserved for French artists.[2] Last but not least, he joined the French Communist Party—this was announced the day before the opening of the salon and attracted the attention of the world's media.[3]

In the Eastern European countries, liberated by the Red Army from Nazi occupation, a great deal of attention was paid by the communist ideologists—the builders of the new social order—to Comrade Picasso. As an effect of the Yalta Conference, these countries were incorporated after the war into the Soviet area of influence. After the liberation, the Western Allies demanded

1 M. Cone, *Artists under Vichy: A Case of Prejudice and Persecution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 137.
2 Gertje R. Utley, *Picasso: The Communist Years* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), 39.
3 Pablo Picasso, interview by Paul Gaillard, *New Masses*, 24 October 1944.

that the rules of democracy be maintained and that free elections be organized. To anyone familiar with Stalin's methods, such a demand may sound like entrusting a lamb to a hungry wolf. However, Stalin was keen to be perceived as a solicitous protector, from an external point of view at least.

On the one hand, the operation of winding up the political and military opposition held by the army, militia, and security service controlled by Moscow was in progress. On the other hand, an appearance of liberalism was upheld as well as the gentle prosocialist method of persuasion, using a carrot rather than a stick. The artistic society—especially that connected with modernist trends—did not declare its resistance. A great number of artists were either left-wing or involved in the communist movement before the war. Their anxiety was caused by socialist realism as the "compulsory" trend in the USSR. It was perceived by the East-Central European modernists as the contradiction of freedom and progress in art.

That is why any political gesture by a famous artist such as Pablo Picasso was a tremendously valuable element in the propaganda machine. Pablo Picasso became the authority for the communists and as such he helped the new system and the new power to be accepted by the elite, or at least to neutralize the resistance. For that reason, the first months after the liberation were the time of propaganda focused on the political gestures of the artist. "The notorious Spanish painter, Pablo Picasso, made the following confession about his reasons for joining the Communist Party of France: 'I became a communist, because the communists are the bravest people in the Soviet Union and in France and in my own fatherland,'" as it was put in the first issue of the Polish periodical *Kuźnica*, which was intended to shape the new Polish intelligentsia. It was a clear message to Polish artists about where to place their political allegiances. The message was supported by other expressions, such as the text by a friend of Picasso, the Soviet writer Ilya Ehrenburg, published in the Soviet *Literaturnaja Gazieta* and then reprinted in the periodicals of East-Central Europe, such as *Przekrój* and *Bildende Kunst*. "Among the communists and the friends of the USSR, there are scientists from France, such as Joliot-Curie, the most prominent artists such as Picasso and Matisse, and the most significant poets, such as Aragon and Eluard. They are not great artists because they joined us, but they joined us because they are great artists."

The Czechoslovak periodical *Zivot* published a text by French critic and member of the Communist Party Roger Garaudy, which was entitled "Artists without Uniform." As Garaudy puts it: "It's every painter's right to paint like Picasso. It is also his right to paint another way. It's the communist's right to like Picasso's work; it's also his right to admire the work of any anti-Picasso. Picasso's painting is not the aesthetic of communism, neither is the art of Taslitsky. There is no compulsory style. Does this mean that Marxism excludes the aesthetic by Picasso or anyone else? Not at all. Marxism is not a prison, but a point of view."[4] The above quotations give the impression of communism as a system in which social and political engagement was followed by freedom in the field of aesthetics. For this reason, the modernists might feel comfortable in the new regime, especially as Picasso was the guarantee of their freedom.

The East-Central European artists and critics seemed to perceive Picasso as the guarantee of freedom; they were aware of the necessity of social metamorphoses in the context of the tragedy of war and wanted to take part in the process. They also wanted to stay in touch with the modernist tradition born in Paris. These dilemmas were expressed by Jindřich Chalupecký, a Czech critic and editor of the periodical *Letters*. Czechoslovakia faced—as Chalupecký put it—the civilizational choice between Eastern socialism and Western modernism. Nevertheless, as he argued, none must be rejected, because it is possible to combine both directions.[5] The art of Picasso and the poetry of Paul Eluard were examples of accepting socialism in art. Neither involved abandoning the achievement of modernism. Socialism as the only way of extricating humanity from a deep crisis should not exclude human heritage; rather it should make use of it. In Poland, a similar point of view was presented by the artists associated with the Group of Young Artists and the critics accompanying them. Tadeusz Kantor and Mieczysław Porębski, the most important Polish artist and art critic of the time, wrote in a text, which was also the manifesto of the Group of Young Artists: "For those of us who, in the darkest times of the occupation, stood by the writers and poets of the cultural resistance movement, Picasso's *Guernica* became the most amazing human

4 R. Garaudy, "Umělcy bez uniformy," *Život* 7–8 (1946).
5 J. Chalupecký, "Kultura a politika," *Listy* 3 (1946).

manifestation."[6] These artists perceived Picasso as the new model of art postulated by the communist ideologists. They perceived the Spaniard's avant-garde style, which was born with cubism as the announcement of the new realism, which was to be more obvious and more simple than the realism of the time. Mieczysław Porębski wrote as much with reference to nineteenth-century realism. He added that a new realism was being created, one that was a synthesis of all the ravings of surrealism and used all the means of expressionism in order to follow the coming reality.

So, the art of Picasso, with *Guernica* as its most important masterpiece, is a synthesis of all the trends of modern art and may be the reflection of the real demand of the new era. The notion of a new era was understood as the comprehensive reality born after the horror of the war. In the shadow of catastrophe, humanity and its environment could no longer be described in academic language. It was only modernism with its expressionist means and deformations of superficial viewpoints that was able to touch the core of reality. This was the point of what Porębski described as intensified realism.

German surrealist and critic Heinz Trökes described Picasso's art in a similar way, calling it spiritual realism. Referring to *Guernica* and the war pictures by Picasso, he wrote: "At a time when everyone is deprived of humanity and humanist convictions, Picasso does not create the portraits of individuals, but pictures of disintegrated women with their faces broken by tears, resting on armchairs, with their faces showing eyes on their foreheads broken by fear, eyes that would call for help from somewhere on another planet. These are the pictures of our time."[7] Trökes's article is one of the points of view expressed in the discussion held in the East German periodical *Bildende Kunst*. The debate touched the problem of modernist art and abstract art. Heinz Trökes's point of view was not a dominant one in the discussion. The main opinion expressed was that of Heinz Lüdecke, who summed up the discussion.[8] The author described Picasso as a decadent artist, but he underlined that this was not an insulting definition; his art was simply connected to the decadent phase of the bourgeoisie, following the Marxist thesis that consciousness is defined by existence.

6 T. Kantor and M. Porębski, "Grupa Młodych Plastyków po raz drugi," *Twórczość* 9 (1946).
7 H. Tröckes, "Moderne Kunst und Zeitbewusstsein," *Bildende Kunst* 3 (1948).
8 H. Lüdecke, "Die Entwirklichung der bürgerlichen Kunst," *Bildende Kunst* 5 (1948).

The discussion on the place of modernist and abstract art in the new socialist world was also held in the art periodicals in Hungary. Here, too, the name Picasso often appeared in various arguments. On the one hand, his art was described as the product of the decadent order of bourgeois society. In this spirit, János Kurta Andrássy wrote his text "Abstract Art in the People's Democracy."[9] On the other hand, other critics, such as Porębski and Trökes, focused on the expression of new realism. Such a point of view was presented by the critic connected with the Hungarian European School, Ernő Kállai, in his response to Andrássy's text: "Attention! The show!"[10] In his opinion, *Guernica* and the war pictures announced the "splendid return of realism."

The critics, close to the modernist movement in the four Middle European countries, perceived Picasso as an exceptional person—a proleftist artist able to express his engagement in the nontraditional form, the synthesis of several avant-garde trends. They described the form as a new realism, which refers perfectly to the condition of humanity after the catastrophe of war. *Guernica* and the other war pictures proved that there was no space for "art for art's sake" in Picasso's work, but the reference to the horrific realities of war and people's lives was achieved in a sensitive manner.

Before we analyze the response of artists to the above critical expressions, let us ask what were the sources of knowledge about Picasso and his art at the time? The main sources were reproductions in magazines and newspapers. Art periodicals such as *Blok*, *Zivot*, *Bildende Kunst*, *Szabad Művészet*, and *Głos Plastyków* printed pictures by Picasso. There were only two exhibitions with Picasso's paintings organized in East-Central Europe at the time. In spring 1947, a French-Hungarian exhibition took place in Budapest. Six works by Picasso were presented there alongside the works of other French painters, such as Matisse and Pignon. The most interesting show was "The Art of Republican Spain," which took place in Prague and Brno in 1946. Even though the exhibition in Czechoslovakia was not a solo show of Picasso's work, it was a unique opportunity to see the recent pieces by the Spaniard at that time and in that region. Nine oil paintings dating from between 1939 and 1945, as well as seven graphic works, dominated and overshadowed the works of others participants—young Spanish artists. The ideological con-

9 J. K. Andrássy, "Abstract Art in People's Democracy?" *Szabad Szó*, 16 June 1946.
10 E. Kállai, "Attention! The Show!" *Szabad Szó*, 23 June 1946.

text of the exhibition needs to be emphasized.[11] In the catalog, as well as in official speeches, the anti-Nazi character of the Spaniards' art, especially of the author of *Guernica*, was firmly stressed. The government was represented by the communist minister, the head of propaganda, Vaclav Kopecky.[12] The exhibition took place ahead of the general election, in which the Communist Party emerged as the most powerful group.

In Poland, there was no way of coming into direct contact with Picasso's work, except one occasion, in 1948, when Picasso came to Poland. Although Pablo Picasso was one of the most important guests of the Peace Congress in Wrocław in 1948, initially inspired by Stalin,[13] there was an attempt to avoid showing his paintings. It is true that a small exhibition of his work was organized, though it only showed ceramics, presenting the artist as a craftsman whose incomprehensible paintings had changed into the products of a pottery workshop.[14] Picasso's ceramics were not what his Polish admirers had expected to see. At that time, a retrospective exhibition of his work could have become an unforgettable artistic event, according to Helen Syrkusowa, an architect associated with modernism, who took care of Picasso during his visit to Poland. "But there was no attempt to organize an exhibition of his work, nor even a lecture or meeting with students of architecture, sculpture or painting."[15] The artist was honored by the state with high distinctions presented by the president, but at the same time he was isolated from the environment of contemporary artists.[16] Apt is the story, quoted by Francoise Gilot, about how during the official congressional dinner, a Russian accused Picasso of cultivating decadence in art in his "impressionist-surrealist" style.[17] Such opinions marked the starting point of an increas-

11 Pavel Štěpánek wrote about what went on backstage of the show: P. Štěpánek, "Španelsti umělci pařižske školy v Praze i Brne 1946," *Bulletin Moravske Galerie w Brne* (1994).

12 *Španělští umělci Pařížské školy v Praze 1946* (Národní galerie v Praze, 1994).

13 Unpublished note by Jerzy Borejsza Jr., quoted by Dorota Folga-Januszewska in D. Folga-Januszewska, *Picasso. Przemiany/Changes* (Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie, 2002), 12; about the roots of the Peace Congress in Wrocław, see also Z. Woźniczka, "Wrocławski Kongres Intelektualistów w obronie pokoju," *Kwartalnik historyczny* 2 (1987): 131–57.

14 Pablo Picasso about his stay in Poland in *Głos Ludu. Pismo Polskiej Partii Robotniczej*, 29 August 1948; *Ceramika. Pablo Picasso we Wrocławiu* (Wrocław: 1948).

15 M. Biborowski, ed., *Picasso w Polsce* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1979): 92.

16 Pablo Picasso spent fourteen days in Poland, apart from his presence on the Peace Congress, he also visited Warsaw, Cracow, and Auschwitz-Birkenau. For a detailed schedule of Picasso's stay in Poland, see *Picasso w Polsce*, 21–22.

17 F. Gilot, *Life with Picasso* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965), 207.

ing intolerance toward modernist art and were a sign of the imminent end of artistic freedom.

Between 1945 and 1948, modernist art developed dynamically as a result of liberal cultural politics. The art of groups such as Grupa 42 in Czechoslovakia—centered around Galerie Gerd Rosen in Berlin—contained plenty of references to Picasso's art. In the art of Františček and František Gross from Grupa 42, the inspiration of the actual paintings of Picasso, especially the women's heads shown at the exhibition "The Art of Republican Spain" interfered with cubism in Czech modernism. The most important source of inspiration for Czech artists was the collection of Vincenc Kramař. In Kramař's collection, besides the works by Picasso and Braque in their analytic cubism period, there was also the notorious 1907 self-portrait by Picasso (now in the National Gallery in Prague). Kramař also possessed works by Emil Filla, the Czech cubist. After his return to Prague from the concentration camp in Buchenwald in 1945, he began to work on a series of pictures that were presented at a show in 1947. Some of his works are dialogues with Picasso's works, exhibited in Prague in 1946. Picasso's inactive women sitting in a closed space are contradicted by Filla's women in action: a sculptor at work and a woman releasing a lark from its cage. The tension between the painters is so clear due to the proximity of Filla's characters to Picasso's style—a proximity that is close to pastiche.

Tadeusz Kantor, the leader of the Young Painters Group, also referred to Picasso in his work. His pictures presenting women, which were created in 1945–47, may be the best example. The synthetic form, rigid contour of color planes, expressive clashes of diversified points of view—all these are connections between Kantor's canvases and the war pictures of women by Picasso. Kantor was not able to see Picasso's works. The intermediary role was played by young French artists following Picasso—André Fougeron, Edouard Pignon presented in Cracow in 1947. Tadeusz Kantor saw the exhibition of French painters as a presentation of the most up-to-date trends in painting of Paris. In his pictures presenting people at work, such as *The Laundress*, Kantor uses the postcubist form to present the theme of the efforts of ordinary people. The artist's social engagement is the clue to these works (Plate 12.1). In 1947, Kantor left Cracow for Paris. After his six-month stay there, his painting changed. Objects and characters disappeared from his canvases and the inspiration from abstract surrealism became clear.

The works of one of the leaders of the Hungarian European School, Dezső Korniss, present an interesting synthesis of inspiration from Picasso with geometric discipline. Korniss became familiar with Picasso's work in the 1930s. Two interesting pictures—which may be perceived as dialogues with Picasso—emerged after the war. One is *The Singers* (1946), where Korniss transposed the famous figures of *The Three Musicians* (1921) into geometrical and abstract forms. The other composition that sums up Korniss's work is the surrealistic *Grasshopper's Wedding*, which emerged in 1948. The canvas is a dialogue with Picasso's *La Joie de Vivre* (1946), the picture referring to Mediterranean culture.

The artists from the circle of the Gerd Rosen Gallery in Berlin, who established the Zone 5 group in 1948, were also strongly influenced by Picasso. In the pictures by Trökes, the leader of the group, one finds echoes of war still lifes with a skull by Picasso. The works by Marc Zimmermann refer to Picasso's surrealistic period. Both artists were employed by the State School of Architecture and Art in Weimar in the Soviet occupation zone. They were dismissed shortly afterward, as soon as the first semester was over. The surrealist influences in their paintings were the reason for their dismissal.[18] Inspiration from Picasso can also be found in the work by artists of the older generation who stayed in the Soviet occupation zone, such as Karl Hofer and Horst Strempel. In a well-known triptych by Strempel, *Night over Germany*, Angela Schneider found the influence of *Guernica*.[19]

The inspiration from Picasso's art presented above should be seen in an ideological context. For many artists and critics, Picasso became the example of political engagement and modernist painting. The artists' references to Picasso were a sign that they were joining the trend of social changes, but also a sign that they were stressing the value of art's autonomy and the freedom of the artist. Soon it became clear that it was not Picasso's painting that was to become the new model of official visual language of the socialist state. By the end of 1948, the communists consolidated their position in the region and a campaign against "formalism" in art began. The campaign did not omit Pablo Picasso himself. In the part of Germany occupied by the Soviets, which

18 K. M. Kober, *Die Kunst der früher Jahre 1945–1949* (Leipzig: Seemann, 1989), 341.

19 A. Schneider, "Picasso in uns selbst," in *Deutschlandbilder. Kunst aus einem geteilten Land*, ed. E. Gillen (Berlin: Dumont, 1997), 359.

was about to become the GDR, the campaign took place in *Tägliche Rundschau*—the newspaper of the communist party SED. Adolf Dymschitz, who initiated the debate, did not hesitate to point to the deep contradiction between Picasso the fighter and Picasso the artist.[20] This discord, as the author puts it, should be a warning for his followers, an instruction to modernist artists, which clearly meant: following the formal path would not be tolerated. Explicitly formulated warnings had been issued by an author with the nickname N. Orlow in the text closing the "formalist debate":

> Some representatives of this absurd trend in GDR painting try to hide behind the name Picasso. Picasso painted a number of paintings in a realist style. One example of his realist work is his famous representation of the dove as a symbol of peace. The formalist 'dislocation' of Picasso means nothing more than the obvious waste of his talent.[21]

Picasso, the popularizer of the image of a dove and olive branch as a secular peace symbol and participant in numerous peace congresses, was perceived as a warrior for peace. Nonetheless, his art—regarded as formalism—was condemned and forbidden behind the Iron Curtain. The absence of his art was nevertheless balanced by the dove's omnipresence. The peace dove, which provided a "trademark" for the peace movement organized by the communists, had influenced almost every area of social life. One might find it in paintings, as well as on posters and in the applied arts.

The new "engaged" Picasso masterpieces emerged in the first half of the 1950s. *Massacre in Korea*, which was Picasso's reaction to the Korean War and the risk of a new global conflict, was painted in January 1951. Even though the communists disliked the painting due to its modernist deformations of women's bodies and its weak emphasis of the invaders' identity as the "American imperialists," it was used in communist propaganda. One example of this may have been the presentation of the picture at the French Painting Exhibition in Warsaw in 1952. The exhibition showed key works by French modernists: Picasso and Léger as artists working with political-

20 A. Dymschitz, "Über die formalistische Richtung in der deutschen Malerei," *Tägliche Rundschau*, 19 November 1948.

21 N. Orlow, "Wege und Irrwegege der modernen Kunst," *Tägliche Rundschau*, 20 January 1951.

ly engaged subjects. Matisse's fabric works were also shown, highlighting his involvement in the applied arts. Works by young, politically active painters, such as Fougeron and Pignon, were also shown.[22] Ryszard Stanisławski used the following words to interpret *Massacre in Korea* in an official art periodical: "Even though in comparison with *Guernica*, Picasso used much more understandable and clear symbols, *Massacre in Korea* may distract the spectator, whose desire is to see more explicit and less symbolical accusations against the American soldiers, less than a nameless torturer hidden in armor."[23] *Massacre in Korea* had reappeared in Warsaw four years later. A large-scale reproduction had been placed in November 1956 on Krakowskie Przedmieście, the main promenade of the capital of Poland, as a sign of solidarity with the Hungarians struggling on the streets of Budapest. The context of the Thaw had changed the meaning of the painting. The characters in armor were identified with Soviet tanks.

A small private gallery run by Eduard Henning in Halle in East Germany was an interesting example of how Picasso was perceived by the communists at the time. Personal relationships between Henning and artists such as Braque and Picasso enabled them to organize small shows of their works in Halle. Most of the exhibitions took place in the second half of the 1950s during the Thaw, but the first one, the graphic work exhibition, took place in 1950. Henning also issued a brochure devoted to the artist. The correspondence between central and regional-level party officers focusing on the brochure offers valuable information about the attitude of the East German authorities toward the art of Picasso and the artist himself. "About the content of the book, one may say that it is an attack on our struggle over realism. . . . It is a sophisticated selection of the most formalist works by this revolutionary artist"—these were the words of the chief of the culture department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party.[24] He also added: "Picasso must not be banned, but the brochure of course will not be launched."

The above view should be perceived as an official example of the authorities' approach to Picasso in the Stalinist years, not only in the GDR. As a no-

22 "Sztuka francuska walczy o pokój," *Przegląd Artystyczny* 2 (1955): 55.

23 R. Stanisławski, "Nowe drogi malarstwa francuskiego," *Przegląd Artystyczny* 3 (1952).

24 H. G. Sehrt, "Die Galerie Heninng in Halle 1947–1962," *Kunstdokumentation SBZ-DDR*, ed. G. Feist, E. Gillen, and B. Vierneisel (Cologne: Dumont, 1996), 241.

torious authority and an icon of the communist peace movement, the artist could not be banned, but his works as the contradiction to socialist realism were not to be popularized or even shown at all. This kind of schizophrenic attitude was present until the second half of the 1950s, when the Thaw overwhelmed the countries that we are focusing on. The Thaw began as the effect of the famous Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party and Khrushchev's letter condemning the crimes of Stalin's regime.

At the time of the Thaw—which took a different path in each country of the region—Pablo Picasso became an important reference for the artists on their way from socialist realism to modernism. The exit, as well as the entrance into socialist realism, took place in the light of discussions held in art newspapers, where the question of realism had remarkably reappeared. When analyzing the discussions, one might have the impression of the "thawing" of the problems that had been "frozen" almost six years earlier. The problem of Picasso reappeared as well. A cold and tense "Picasso discussion" took place in *Bildende Kunst* in 1955. In the discussion, initiated with a text by Heinz Lüdecke, "The Phenomenon and the Problem of Picasso," published in 1955 and involving several German and foreign artists and critics, the following question was raised: Is it possible to reconcile social engagement with modernist form? As Martin Damus puts it: "some proved that there must be a contradiction between the progressive engagement of Picasso and his formalist art, while others underlined that progressive engagement is also connected with his artistic modernity."[25] The discussion also touched on a wider problem, which was the embracing of modernity in a socialist country and also an attempt to fill the crack that had appeared five years earlier. A similar discussion held in Poland in the large-format weekly magazine *Przegląd Kulturalny* (The cultural review) seemed much more liberal. It began with an article by Juliusz Starzyński, a prominent art historian linked to the communist regime, who on the pages of the official art historical bulletin highlighted the importance of Picasso's art.[26] It was a definite change in the tone of writing about Picasso and at the same time a revitalization of modernist art. Not

25 M. Damus, *Malerei der DDR, Funktionen der bildenden Kunst im Realen Sozialismus* (Hamburg: Reinbek, 1991).

26 J. Starzński, "Sztuka wieczyście młoda—kilka uwag o malarstwie Picassa w związku z ostatnimi wystawami," *Materiały do Studiów i Dyskusji z Zakresu Teorii i Historii Sztuki, Krytyki Artystycznej i Badań nad Sztuką* 1–2 (1955).

long after, in *Przegląd Kulturalny*, the young artist Jerzy Ćwiertnia published a text in which Picasso was the main hero. Referring to the Warsaw presentation of *Massacre in Korea*, he put forward the notion of abolishing the opposition to "realism-distortion," on which the current criticisms were based.[27] "There is no art without distortion" ends the article—a brave slogan supported by the authority of the creator of *Guernica*. This text led to the discussion illustrated in many of Picasso's paintings. Its theme was the level of distortion in art, which at the same time did not altogether do away with thematic aspects.

In Czechoslovakia—despite all the voices breaking the silence about Picasso—the discussion was not taken up.[28] Controversy arose due to abstract art, not the modernism of Picasso. After the Thaw, however, Picasso's work inevitably became a less lively reference and more like a museum object, especially when abstract art turned into the most influential trend. Such a phenomenon had clearly been visible in Poland as early as 1956–57; the same process occurred in Czechoslovakia at the beginning of the 1960s. In the GDR, on the other hand, the process of liberalization had slowed down in 1959 after the congress in Bitterfeld. Since then socialist realism, even if slightly modified, became a compulsory mainstream trend there. In Hungary, where after the bloody suppression of the Budapest revolution there was not even a trace of the cultural Thaw, the embracing of new trends occurred so late that Picasso's art could cause no lively interest.[29]

Let us ask how the Thaw concerning Picasso's work and the elimination of the discrepancy between Picasso the modernist and Picasso the activist were reflected in the art of that time. One might say that there is a clear generation gap in the artistic reception of Picasso. The artists of the older generation, who were connected with modernism and whose reaction to his art was very lively in the second half of the 1950s, preferred to turn to informal and abstract painting. The work of an East German artist, Willi Sitte, seems to be an exception as he joined the trend of socialist realism. After 1954, Sitte took up

27 J. Ćwiertnia, "O smaku destylowanej wody, o metodzie uchylania drzwi i jeszcze o kilku sprawach natury artystycznej," *Przegląd Kulturalny* 11 (1955).

28 In 1956 in Czechoslovakia several texts revaluated Picasso's art after years of social realism. See J. Padrta, "75 let Pabla Picassa," *Vytvarna Prace* 15–16 (1956).

29 Similar as in the DDR, Poland and Hungary before the Budapest Uprising, some texts which revaluate Picasso's art were published. See E. Korner, "Picasso," *Szabad Művészet* 1–2 (1956).

the themes from the field of communist propaganda, but he used a costume derived from Picasso's pictures. In the picture *Mörder von Koye*, Sitte took up the theme of the American massacre of North Korean prisoners of war. The theme was broadcast by the communist propaganda. The model for Sitte in terms of style was *Massacre in Korea* by Picasso. After 1956 Sitte began the series of sketches for *Lidice*, a painting depicting a Nazi massacre in a Czech village in 1942. Sitte's aim was to create *Lidice* as an Eastern European *Guernica* and embody anti-Nazi communist propaganda. In order to achieve such an effect, Sitte used not only the famous *Guernica*, but also other works such as *The Morgue* (1944–45) and *Massacre in Korea*. The sketches for this picture represent the attempt of the synthesis of the most engaged works of Picasso.

Paradoxically, the older part of Picasso's œuvre was the focus of younger artists whose debut took place in the 1950s. Young German artists such as Manfred Bötcher and Harald Metzkes looked to the precubist works of Picasso, which meant the possibility of avoiding the principles of socialist realism imported from the USSR and dealing with realist form at the same time. Ralf Winkler (later known as A. R. Penck) was an exceptional painter who used Picasso as his reference. Winkler is the author of plenty of sketches, beginning in 1956 when he analyzed the early and cubist style of Picasso. Also, in his most renowned pictures that emerged in the 1960s, such as *Weltbild Nr 1* (1963), one finds echoes of the diptych *War* and *Peace*, which emerged in 1952.

Picasso's art was a kind of ideological rejection of socialist realism, but also a search for its alternative version, the abandoning of academic fossilization and the preservation of representation with a distance to abstract art.

In Czechoslovakia, the followers of Emil Filla gathered in the Group Trasa referred to the tradition of Picasso's art and cubism (V. Hermanska, C. Kafka, D. Matouś, etc.). These artists attempted to resuscitate the tradition of modernism and connect it with the observation of everyday reality. In their work, apart from the inspiration from Picasso's war still lifes, one notices the lively influence of Bernard Buffet, whose painting was extremely popular at the time in Paris. The popularity of Buffet confirmed their choice. The beginning of the Prague Thaw in the 1960s brought about the abandonment of reanimated modernism by the young artists who chose the path of abstract art. Dalibor Matouś, one of Filla's followers, complained about it and criticized

the abstract choice of his colleagues. He asked rhetorical questions about whether the "future development would follow Picasso."[30]

Polish artists of the younger generation, such as Tadeusz Dominik and Stefan Gierowski, underwent a similar evolution. After a short period of being influenced by Picasso, they abandoned figurative art to devote their work to abstraction. The reference to Picasso was in this case a short Thaw episode, a step on the way out of socialist realism, which was always perceived as repulsive, and toward abstract art, which was then so desirable as a synonym of freedom and the renewal of the broken contact with the art of the West.

In Hungary, after the suppression of the Budapest Revolution, the artistic Thaw that would resemble the process in Poland and Czechoslovakia did not take place. The embracing of Western trends came in the 1960s. Picasso was not an up-to-date reference for Hungarian artists. Nevertheless, one finds echoes of his art in the works of some artists, such as the painter Sándor Bortnyik, an active member of the 1920s avant-garde. In the 1960s, he began a series of pictures entitled *Modernization of the Classic*, which took the form of a pastiche, where the masterpieces of old painters were presented in new, modern versions. Picasso's style was represented by the reference to the famous painting by Tizian, *The Girl with the Fruits on a Tray (Lavinia)*. Bortnyik refers to the series by Picasso, who worked on masterpieces, such as Delacroix's *The Algerian Women* or *Las Meninas* by Velasquez.

Discussions at the time of the Thaw were the last occasion when Picasso's work was a vivid political and artistic phenomenon. In the 1960s, the modernism of Picasso seemed to lose its significance as a reference for contemporary artists. Picasso's art became a part of mass culture. The term *pikas* is a symbol of the process. It was commonly used in Poland to identify any abstract form.[31] The generality of the term echoes the intense reception of Picasso in the first postwar decades when his popularity as the fighter for freedom was far ahead of the familiarity with his art.

30 P. Štepan, "Ozvěny kubismu. Navraty a inspirace kubismu v Českem uměni 1920–2000," *Dum u Černe Matky Boži* (2000): 38–39.

31 A. Osęka, "Stereotypy a plastyka użytkowa," *Kultura i społeczeństwo* 2 (1963).

13

On *Propagarde*: The Late Period of the Romanian Artist M. H. Maxy

Erwin Kessler

Next to Tristan Tzara, Marcel Janco, and Victor Brauner, Max Herman, known as Maxy (b. Braila, 1895, and d. Bucharest, 1971) was a (if not *the*) key figure of the Romanian avant-garde. His connections to communist ideas, to socialist realist practices and to proauthoritarian discourse were a long, paradigm-like process of turning avant-garde experience into advanced, progressive propaganda or "propagarde."

Maxy started in Romania with portraits of peasants and soldiers at the end of the First World War, and as a pupil of the expressionist Iosif Iser and the traditionalist Camil Ressu he lived and worked between 1922 and 1923 in Berlin, under the guidance of his compatriot Arthur Segal, a prominent figure of the radical leftist artists' association, the Novembergruppe. In Berlin, Maxy rapidly and thoroughly converted to cubist practices, socialist ideas and functionalist predictions. However, Maxy's solo show at the Galerie Der Sturm in 1923 was rather a portfolio success. Back in Romania, he engaged in an art missionary project with modernity, modernism, and modernization at its core. In November 1924, he organized, together with ex-Dada pillar Marcel Janco, the international exhibition of the avant-garde magazine *Contimpo-*

ranul. In 1925, Maxy himself became the editor of the second-most important Romanian avant-garde magazine, *Integral*, a more coherently constructivist platform than *Contimporanul*, issuing a series of manifestos and theoretical texts that marked the late avant-garde artistic discourse of the time. Maxy also founded his own art production facility, a Warhol-style factory called Studio Maxy. At Studio Maxy, art was on offer, together with stage props, cubist carpets and interior design, prints, advertising, and almost everything connected with art and artistic handicraft. But no matter how professional and apparently adapted to the capitalist requirements of the day Maxy's complex artistic and organizational output was, it was generally met with social indifference and cultural resistance. *Integral* disappeared in 1927. Studio Maxy went into hibernation, with only a few commissions until the 1930s.

This seems paradoxical, given the ideological standpoint of Maxy. He backed (like most of the European late avant-garde) the power system in place, the industrial/financial society, seen as the expression of historical progress, and even the authoritarian discourse, perceived as best attuned to social development. Maxy espoused a cultural-artistic Darwinism and an ideological organicism, inspired by the totalitarian discourse of the time. He promoted his own *integralism* as a thorough apology of the given, a rigorous *actualism*, characterized by a kind of utopia of the present, hypostasized as the only adequate, inspirational reality. The manifesto he published in the first issue of the magazine, *The Integral Man*, was clear on this point: "the integralists synthesize the will of life from everywhere and from every epoch and the efforts of all the modern experiences. Submerged in collectivity, the integralists produce its style, following the instincts revealed to itself in this way."[1] The voluntarism and the collective instinctualism so typical of the fascist, antidemocratic discourse of the time perceivably permeated the radical modernism of Maxy's integralism: "Democracy invented the encyclopedia and grafted it onto the soul of any shopkeeper, commissioner or usurer. This is why the new art must fight the encyclopedists [the *illuminists—E. K.*]. New art, that is ART, refuses itself to democracy, to vulgarity."[2]

Whereas the avant-garde boosted dissent facing the given power, Maxy's *integralism* sported consent, expecting to be employed by the system as an autho-

1 *Integral* 1 (1925): 1.
2 M. H. Maxy, "Politica Plastica," *Integral* 9 (1926): 5.

rized cultural militia. He played the instrumentalist expert, but his expertise was not required by the society he constantly courted. His attraction to various extremes subsequently grew. In 1930, he organized Marinetti's visit to Romania, and as a friend of Marinetti's he participated in the fascist exhibition of futurist art in Rome in 1933. However, his early, Berlin-related, leftist penchants flourished again as his work throughout the late 1930s marked a step back from the previous cubo-futurist, constructive abstraction, to a sentimental socialist and decorative, postcubist form of New Objectivity (Neue Sachlichkeit), dominated by lumpenproletarian imagery (beggars, prostitutes and unemployed people, etc.) rendered in sophisticated, softly modernized, cubo-realist figurations.

When the right-wing parties came into power in 1940, Maxy was banned from exhibiting. During the Second World War he worked less, exhibited at home, concentrated on the Israelite Art School and the Jewish Theatre Studio in Bucharest, and connected to communist agents. In the Illegal Communist Repertory of 1951, file number 19898, Maxy states that he had been a member of the Communist Party since 1942, mentioning that he had conducted tasks for the party back in 1939.[3]

After 23 August 1944, when Romania turned against Germany, Maxy became a central figure in the propaganda mechanism of the legalized Communist Party. As early as 30 September 1944, Maxy cofounded a professional association of "democratic artists."[4] Relying on his languishing lumpenproletarian figures of the 1930s and on the rapidly processed ideological prescripts of Soviet socialist realism, Maxy hurried to produce the first ever socialist realist exhibition in Romania. In July 1945, he opened the solo show *Work and Art* in Bucharest. A few months later he organized the first colloquium on socialist realist art in Bucharest. But Maxy had little or no knowledge of the proper Soviet socialist realist art, and he had had no prior artistic exchange with communist propaganda artists. He would not travel to Moscow until late 1958, but his will to import socialist realism was so strong that he somehow invented and adapted it to Romania, starting from Andrei Zhdanov's theses on socialist realism (in his discourse at the First Congress of Soviet Writers, 17 August 1934).

3 Document reproduced in Stelian Tanase, *Avangarda romaneasca in arhivele Sigurantei* (Iasi: Polirom, 2008), 203.

4 Petre Oprea, *M. H. Maxy* (Bucharest: Meridiane, 1974), 25.

Maxy followed the requirements of Zhdanovist socialist realism (art ascribing to itself the task of "educating and transforming the workers in the socialist way," according to Zhdanov) by going directly out onto the fields to feed his art to the working classes. His trip in 1945 to the destitute mining region of Romania, the Jiu Valley, was immediately reflected in his exhibition *Figures and Landscapes from Jiu Valley*, which opened in Bucharest in December 1945 (Plate 13.1). In January 1946, Medi Dinu (wife of the avant-garde friend Gheorghe Dinu, alias Stephane Roll) wrote about the show as if it were a crucial event, a "painted report" which "breaks the spider web between artist and reality" with "only the means of a slogan: Art in the people's service," which made it easier for the artist to access "the social utility, like that of the professor, of the journalist, of the miner or of the engineer."[5] Medi Dinu was purposely employing key words pertaining to the Soviet socialist realist rhetoric, like the above-mentioned slogan or the "engineering" work of the artist, which echoed Stalin's prescription for communist artists to become "engineers of the soul," turned into a dogma by Zhdanov back in 1934. Later, Maxy considered that the exhibition assimilated socialist realist endeavors with "constructive and realist art . . . a scientific artistic style, opposed to far-fetched sentimental romanticism."[6] Condemning bourgeois "romanticism" was, again, a tactical import by Zhdanov, but the insertion of "constructive" aesthetic engineering into it was entirely his own, unmasking his will to negotiate a theoretical conciliation with Soviet socialist realism. Maxy started to reframe Romania's and his own avant-garde history along the lines of socialist realism:

> The bourgeois conception, the lack of an ideal, moral belief impoverished the human creative force and induced in the artists some autonomous, purely craftsmanship formulas . . . but some of the artists realized that art could not stay isolated in its own existence and must participate in the struggle between the advancing social classes and the static, decadent ones . . . it was only Victor Brauner who kept away from this struggle, through his firm surrealist position.[7]

5 Medi i Dinu, "M. H. Maxy la Sala Dalles," *Orizont* (January 1946).
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.

One could easily perceive that Maxy preserved his interwar organicist, aesthetic and political Darwinism ("the struggle between the advancing social classes and the static, decadent ones"), adapting it from his original pro-fascist discourse (against "vulgarity, democracy, encyclopedia" as he wrote in 1925), to a procommunist one, now courting the proletariat, described by Zhdanov himself as "the only progressive, avant-garde class."

However, mostly socialist realist observant critics had already reproached him for "the incapacity of truly deepening into the expressive physiognomy, the schematic treatment of the characters, and the constructivist decomposition of the plans, too much connected to cubism."[8] In fact, his "socialist realism" was nothing but his previous sentimental decorative variant of the cubist-decorative New Objectivity of the 1930s, now calibrated on the "real workers" instead of the lumpenproletariat, employing the tools of Soviet socialist realist dogma. Even the schematism of the characters and the frequently misplaced joy they show in *Group of Miners* (1949) reflect Maxy's sense of the Zhdanovist prescription of "enthusiastic and optimistic" representations.

Maxy promptly accumulated a few administrative and executive positions within the communist regime. Between 1944 and 1946 he was an instructor at the Department of Arts of the Communist Party. Between 1946 and 1948 he was general secretary of the communist organization of artists. In 1950, he became Counselor in the Ministry of Arts, while between 1948 and 1950 he served as the president of the Fine Artists' Trade Union. Finally, after having been nominated in 1949, he rose in 1950 to the highest position available to a living artist, that of director of the National Museum of Art in Bucharest, which was practically founded for him. He held this position for twenty years, until his death in 1971.

This success story had moments of real tension, significant for the demodernizing trajectory of the former avant-garde during communist rule. Maxy's worst problems occurred during the anti-Semitic campaign of purges. Inspired by the Soviet Union, the Romanian Communist Party engaged in an internal battle against its own "defectors." During the secret session of the assembly of Creative Artists' Unions on 27 June 1952, Maxy was "unmasked" as a "formalist deviant."

8 Oprea, *M. H. Maxy*, 26.

Answering the accusations concerning the value and the truth of his "realism," Maxy engaged in a reworking of his own career in order to adapt his previous work to his present condition:

> In 1935 [*only one year after Zhdanov codified socialist realism, implying that he had had early knowledge of it—E. K.*] we tried to break free from formalism and explore the problems of socialist realism in our art. Geo Bogza and others did the same. This relationship with socialist realism brought us to the [Communist Party]. Beginning in 1937–38, we became disgusted by the ugliness of our minds, by the temptations in our art, produced by our education and the isolation of our lives. We understood that only approaching the party will lead eventually to the insertion of truth in our art. But the difference of education between what we knew and what should exist could not be bridged otherwise than by new instruction, and this was not possible until 23 August 1944. Until that moment, we were fighters along the lines of the party, but not along the lines of socialist realism.[9]

The subtle manipulation of Maxy consists in the surprising reinterpretation and recuperation of the historical avant-garde for the benefit of communist propaganda, introducing the idea that the quest for a realist "truth" was already contained in the trajectory of the late avant-garde. He implied that artists such as himself and poets such as Geo Bogza had already made attempts to map realism and communism long before communism was installed in Romania by the Soviet Union, that is to say, freely, and without being forced by recent historical developments. Moreover, their early exploration of communism and realism were an outcome of the limits experienced by the avant-garde, made visible precisely by practicing the avant-garde, not by abstaining from it. Maxy's reading of the history of avant-garde art recommends it as a proper antechamber of socialist realism. Maxy's opportunistic sophism was destined to cover theoretically his "formalist" position, and to

9 Mihaela Cristea, ed., *Reconstituiri necesare- Dactilograma Sedintei din 27 iunie 1952* (Iasi: Polirom, 2005), 111. Maxy began to push further the reworking of his avant-garde years. In 1947 he mentioned, instead of 1935, "the years 1936–1937, when I personally started to assimilate the doctrine [*the communist one –E. K.*] through diverse links and friendships with leftist activists." Leandru Popovici, "De vorba cu pictorul Maxy despre el si despre altii," *Rampa*, 27 July 1947.

protect not only his endangered life, but also a certain independence, a possible "avant-garde exception" within the propaganda system of which he would actually take advantage at a later stage.

Having survived the wave of purges, Maxy consolidated his position as a leading official artist of the regime. He was present in all prominent national and international exhibitions, from Bucharest to Moscow and Venice. Maxy's socialist realist works appear on postcards mass-produced by the Romanian postal services. His artistic production began to refer to the subjects imposed by the propaganda: factories, workers, peasants, the "liberation" of Bucharest by the Red Army and even the political detainees of the communist regime. In 1954, he became Artist Emeritus. Again in 1954, he was one of the artists to represent Romania at the 28th Venice Biennale. That same year, the British pavilion was showing Francis Bacon, and Willem de Kooning was exhibited in the American pavilion. Maxy showed monumental socialist realist, purely propagandist works such as *The Richness of the Romanian Waters*, realistically depicting happy fishermen unloading a boat full of fish. Significantly, the faces of the "Romanian" fishermen and women in the painting look more Russian (that is, quintessentially communist) than Romanian. However, Soviet socialist realism was shown in Venice only two years after Maxy. Thus, in the wake of larger, global political changes (i.e., Romania's increasingly autonomous foreign policy), the international view of the "copy" predated that of the "original," marking a political advance, a distancing from it. Yet, in using archetypal, Russian communist figures, the "copy" marked a proximity to the "original," while also substituting it. Such "autonomous dogmatism" was a strong and versatile political statement, largely significant for the Romanian standpoint at that time.

Maxy's stiff and mechanical realism, grafted upon his own variant of cubist New Objectivity developed in the 1930s, loses the original bourgeois, decorative sentimentality, while moving closer to the cynical triumphalism of the grand rhetorical, empty gestures requested by the current cultural propaganda. Some of his works of the late 1950s are not only realistic, but also (pseudo)traditionalist, as he grappled with the increasingly nationalist turn that singled out the Romanian regime in the communist camp. As if going back to his earliest tracks, to his beginnings in the early 1920s, and to his master, Camil Ressu, Maxy exploited the most codified traditionalist scenery:

peasants once again take up a prominent position in his art, minutely rendered in their village milieu, with their supposed ancient tools and clothes, dances and feasts.

He fused together the propagandist simulation of research for innovation with an ideological phantasm of the traditionalist preservation of ancient values. Maxy was to follow this path throughout the 1960s, succeeding in adapting communist propaganda even to his discovery of Pop art. He always counted on the official, perceivable ideological engagement beneath his artistic prodigies. As if in a humorous fable (clearly referring to the secret services' practices of investigating the content of artistic exchanges of informed and journeying figures such as Maxy), his old avant-garde friend Gheorghe Dinu (Stephane Roll) was explicit on this point when assimilating Maxy with a traveler in front of the customs office: "Let's delve into your luggage, traveler! However, customs officers know too well that you are not going to smuggle anything. All that you have are the luminous clothes of your miraculous trip, your spontaneous, sincere, naive notations. You, traveler, may pass!"[10]

For an expert such as Maxy, fusing together tradition and innovation to create propaganda was like solving a puzzle. And he did it so admirably that his old avant-garde friend, Marcel Janco, who flew to Israel before the Second World War, wrote to him, in a letter dated 15 April 1969 and preserved in the Maxy archive (written after seeing an exhibition of contemporary Romanian art in Israel, organized through his own and Maxy's intermediary, who was well-connected to both the communist regime and Zionist circles), that "The real surprise is your painting: neo-Dada and Pop! Bravo, you remained in the avant-garde!" [11]

There is no exaggeration in Marcel Janco's perception. In fact, most of the Western connections of the few avant-garde artists remaining in Romania were represented by their ancient avant-garde companions, now more or less successful émigrés, such as ex-Dada Marcel Janco or surrealists such as Victor Brauner, Jacques Hérold, and the Lettrist Isidore Isou, etc. The Maxy archive preserves an unsigned letter from one of his Romanian friends from France,

10 Gheorghe. Dinu, *M. H. Maxy* (Bucharest: Dalles Hall, 1965), 4.

11 Itzhak Artzi, *In Memoriam M. H. Maxy*, document no. 4752, Maxy Archive, Muzeul National de Arta al Romaniei, Bucharest: "In 1945, when Romania was liberated, he becomes the first president of the Jewish Democratic Committee (C.D.E.), at a time when important Zionist circles were also part of C.D.E."

reading like a guide: "My dear Maxy, I send you the *Express* magazine, where you will find interesting things for you on page 14."[12] The émigrés fueled their counterparts behind the Iron Curtain with their own perception of the development of contemporary art. Jacques Hérold sent Maxy a greeting card in 1971 (preserved in the Maxy archive) with a reproduction of one of his surrealist works on one side, and with the poem "Eclats," dedicated by Michel Butor to Jacques Hérold, on the other side. As most of the active and successful Romanian émigré artists belonged to the surrealist movement, their Romanian correspondents took surrealism to be *the* style of the time.

Even foreign eyes peeping into the Romanian communist art scene misplaced Maxy's avant-garde figure in the same framework. An article from an unidentified French newspaper,[13] *La Roumanie des Arts aujourd'hui*, signed by Saint-Evremond, who was apparently in Bucharest in the 1960s (invited by the communist authorities in a typical propaganda move), reports a meeting with Maxy, the director of the National Museum of Art, introducing him to the French readers as the "âme de ce palais, pétillant comme un verre de champagne, avec qui nous avons communiqué dans l'esprit du surréalisme." To the French author, surrealism covered the whole avant-garde in Romania.

No émigré, ex-avant-garde Romanian artist fueled Maxy with information and know-how concerning Pop art, as there were no prominent ex-Romanian artists involved in Pop art at all. Maxy's access to both neo-Dada and Pop art was entirely an exploration (and exploitation) of his own. He drew information on recent art movements from his position as director of the National Museum of Art (1951–71), and as professor at the Art Institute in Bucharest (between 1948 and 1951), or as a senior executive in various political administrative art institutions and commissions, but also as an exponent of the "new," communist Romanian art in most of the official exhibitions abroad. Maxy was exhibited in (or he traveled in an official capacity with a Romanian art exhibition to) Moscow (1948), Prague (1956), Cuba and Poland (1958), Budapest (1959), and Czechoslovakia, Finland, Egypt, and Greece (1960), etc. Maxy had many opportunities to collect news about art, but he actually had only a few points of reference for judging what was significant, valuable and influential in contemporary art, as he only participat-

12 Document no. 4677, Maxy Archive, Muzeul National de Arta al Romaniei, Bucharest.
13 Document no. 4760, Maxy Archive, Muzeul National de Arta al Romaniei, Bucharest.

ed in propaganda shows, and not in competitive, nonofficial, group exhibitions, as most of the new protagonists of recent art were increasingly doing. The Maxy archive shows that after the Second World War, he had no fellow artist correspondents in the West besides Janco. Most of Maxy's correspondents were museum directors from the communist countries, such as Max Seydewitz, general director of the Staatlichen Kunstsammlungen in Dresden, or Stanislav Lorentz, director of the Polish National Museum of Art in Warsaw, with whom he generally had an official and circumstantial exchange of bureaucratic courtship and communist slogans.[14]

One of the special pieces of correspondence from the Maxy archive is the letter[15] received in 1966 from the prominent modern art historian Bernard Dorival, from the Musée National d'Art Moderne in Paris, concerning Maxy's participation in a collective exhibition in Paris dedicated to the historical avant-garde. Dorival expressed to Maxy his wish to show "une de vos toiles de l'époque dadaiste." Maxy had practically no dadaist period at all, and this shows the lack of information (if not of interest) on the part of the French art historian behind the Iron Curtain. From the letter, it appears that Maxy wished to show more of his works, especially recent works, in Paris. Dorival insists: "Ne m'en veuillez pas de restreindre votre représentation à une seule œuvre." Then he politely masks his guided interest in older works of Maxy: "je vous laisse le soin de choisir l'œuvre que vous estimez la plus caractéristique de votre période dadaiste. Ma préférence irait au portrait de Tristan Tzara." It seems that he was indicating a portrait dated 1924, now kept in the National Museum of Art in Bucharest, which is viewed by some art historians as a replica or a pastiche made by Maxy in the 1960s. The pastiche could very well be related to the letter of Dorival, and to the perceivable tension behind it: Dorival wanted an older "dadaist work" from a nondadaist artist who possibly wanted to exhibit something else. Maxy was apparently only left with the option of counterfeiting himself, creating not a dadaist work, but a work representing the Dada pope, Tzara (against whom he wrote on several occasions in the 1920s).

14 Document no. 4705, Maxy Archive, Muzeul National de Arta al Romaniei, Bucharest: "Lieber verehrter Prof. Maxy zu ihrem 70 Geburtstag übermittle ich Ihnen meine und meiner Mitarbeiter besten Wünsche für gute Gesundheit und weiterhin erfolgreiches Schaffen im Geiste freundschafltiicher Zusammenarbeit grüsst Sie herzlichst, Max Seydewitz Generaldirektor der Staatlichen Kunstsammlungen Dresden."

15 Document no. 4695, Maxy Archive, Muzeul National de Arta al Romaniei, Bucharest.

Maxy was not misled in taking older artistic patterns (such as surrealism) as trendsetters for contemporaneous art matters. His ever-present *actualism* made him able to grasp the latest and most influential novelty, Pop art, which he linked in the 1960s to his own previous constructivist brand. He was one of the very few artists politically entitled to do so.

However, if one conducts a survey of his works of the late 1960s, characterized by constructivist, neo-Dada and Pop art influences, one perceives that Maxy always used neo-avant-garde means in the service of the communist regime's propaganda. The fact that a prominent artist permitted himself to make incursions into Western art was, in itself, a strategy of the regime to present itself as technically liberal, open, while remaining dogmatically closed. Proof is a document issued in 1969 by the Romanian Fine Artists' Union.[16] It is the approval of Maxy's earlier request to mount a solo show in the Federal Republic of Germany, supported by the German Artistic Council (the exhibition never took place, though). The approval clearly states that the show is permitted, but at the artist's own expense. Openness (as closure) was a matter of the regime's image, especially after 1965, when Nicolae Ceaușescu inaugurated a kind of politics of the Romanian exception in the communist camp.

But the actual content of Maxy's works, which emanated from his incursions into the new territories of Western art, was neither innovative nor provocative. They were decorative instead. He put Pop art into neoconstructivism, onto the background of communist propaganda, as if there were no ideological tension in the background, as if Pop art were merely an art-style kit, with no political meaning. His instrumental and transideological, almost postmodern practice, meant that his late, reinnovative art was completely overlooked by foreign art scouts mapping the Eastern Bloc in the 1960s. Emerging, younger, Romanian, neo-avant-garde figures were preferred. At the groundbreaking constructivist Nuremberg Biennale of 1969, Maxy, the oldest living constructivist *en titre* in Romania was not invited, but the experimental 111 (later Sigma) Group of Timișoara was. Richard Demarco had known Maxy, too, as is clear from a greeting card from 1970, with a drawing by him and a few handwritten words for Maxy.[17] But Demarco's choice

16 Document no. 4645, Maxy Archive, Muzeul National de Arta al Romaniei, Bucharest.
17 Document no. 4674, Maxy Archive, Muzeul National de Arta al Romaniei, Bucharest.

was to promote younger Romanian artists such as Paul Neagu, Ion Bitzan, or Horia Bernea, and not Maxy.

Maxy's position was very delicate: he wanted to appear as an innovator or, at least, an internationally connected artist. But he wanted to appear as a professional servant of the regime, too, both inside and outside the country. Mission impossible: during the 1960s, serving the regime was already a mark of lacking professionalism in the eyes of an increasingly critical, global art scene. Maxy's fanciful technocratic, late avant-garde experiments of *propagarde* were assimilated with the dead-end of official propaganda.

As always with him, his borrowings were purely instrumental. It was about discovering a new arsenal and a new grammar, inspired by the ancient avant-garde structures. By far the most impressive accomplishment of this (dis)simulated research of Maxy is his assemblage of 1969, symptomatically called *The Communists* (Plate 13.2). It is a huge wooden panel with massive steel plates on it (symbolizing the development of industry under communist rule), onto which there is a stenciled frieze with Romania's official, communist coat of arms, serially repeated as a pattern, precisely in the same way as Warhol repeated his iconic Coca-Cola bottles. Maxy added a stenciled poem on the steel plates, "The Communists," written by the official poet, Eugen Jebeleanu. The massive steel plates are held together by huge screws in industrial ceramic, some technological ready-made pieces taken from electrical devices precisely to suggest communism's contribution to the (electrical, modernizing) "illumination" of the people (Lenin's thesis). So as not to miss anything from the official ideological discourse, Maxy has placed in the upper left-hand corner a handmade, traditional earthenware saucer, manufactured in Romania (another ready-made piece symbolizing the coalescence of the national tradition with modernizing communist society in the propaganda discourse).

The hijacking of Pop art rhetoric is done from a retrograde standpoint. Maxy uses Pop art's tautological and antiallegorical strategies in a profoundly allegorical framework, turning innovation into simulacrum and provocation into propaganda. This challenging artistic contrivance marks the first moment of local neo-avant-garde transvestitism. Maxy's long-standing process of demodernizing his own work and ideology is vested into a fake proof of remodernization. The work turns into the instrumentalist *ars poetica* of

an expert in visual maneuvering, building a platform on which an imported and depleted (uncritical) experiment is decoratively cohabiting with official propaganda in order to support a harmless, visual modernity, with a Western form and an Eastern core: *propagarde*. This way of thinking applies to a whole future artistic generation devoted to simulation and submission in the second half of the twentieth century. During the mid-1970s, the younger Romanian experimentalists chosen by Western art scouts in the 1960s entered Maxy's pattern of mock experiment, too. For decades, aestheticized neo-avant-garde was to be subverted by bare survival, becoming—paradoxically—a regressive stance contradictorily ensuring artistic innovation and political stagnation.

14

Realism and Internationalism: On *Neuererdiskussion* by Willi Neubert (1969)

Jérôme Bazin

Neuererdiskussion (Plate 14.1) represents a meeting of innovators (*Neuerer*), a title that existed from the end of the 1940s to reward workers who suggested improvements in production. If, following an inspection by engineers, the proposal was accepted, the worker would receive a financial reward for their help. The painting thus presents a picture of socialist democracy, in which employees can be involved in the organization and running of the company. We thus see a meeting between, on the right, the workers—the social base of the new regime[1]—and on the left, the engineers, who became increasingly privileged during the 1960s, to the point of becoming one of the most important socialist elites.[2] The painting positions itself in the tension between the ideal and reality, the equal distribution of skills and words at the heart of the world of work, which retains an irremediably hierarchical structure between

1 From the abundant literature on the history of the world of the worker in the GDR, we mention the most recent synthesis: Christoph Klessmann, *Arbeiter im "Arbeiterstaat" DDR. Deutsche Traditionen, sowjetisches Modell, westdeutsches Magnetfeld (1945–1971)* (Berlin: Dietz, 2007).

2 Dolores L. Augustine, *The Red Prometheus: Engineering and Dictatorship in East Germany, 1945–1990* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007).

workers and engineers, and which continues to distribute social positions unequally, between those at the bottom and those at the top.

Its creator Willi Neubert (1920–2011) worked in Thale, a small industrial town in Saxony-Anhalt in the GDR. His career is representative of that of a number of artists committed to socialist realism. On his return from the war in 1945, this worker's son took his turn working in the foundries of Thale before becoming a draughtsman following an accident at work. He began spending time in amateur art circles and in 1950 he was assigned by his company to the Burg Giebichenstein Hochschule für Kunst und Design Halle, where he benefitted from the opportunities for social promotion that were offered during the early years of the regime. His attachment to state socialism was, therefore, as much a part of a social path as an intellectual commitment. He became one of the most treasured realist artists. His paintings, representing brigades and party meetings, make him one of the examples of a new generation of artists who shook off bourgeois habits. Although a professor at Burg Giebichenstein and a member of the leadership of the artists' union of Halle, he nonetheless carried out the most important part of his work in Thale, in the foundries to which he was attached through what is known as a contract of friendship. It is in this context that, in 1969, the union commissioned *Neuererdiskussion* for the unbelievably high price of 16,000 marks.

Socialist realism, in its requirement that it must speak to all and be of service to the party and the workers, is duty bound to be "close" to the people, "linked" to the people. Its roots in an immediate environment are one of the essential principles of socialist realism, which recaptures here the old claim of nineteenth-century realism to be of its time and in its time. We would like to show, using the example of *Neuererdiskussion*, how this proximity is not without its links to internationalism, as it is understood in the communist world. The painting thus enables us to understand the link between localism and internationalism, which we consider is characteristic of this type of art.

Following its creation in Thale, the painting is first displayed in the neighboring town of Halle. But in 1969, the National Gallery asks the union to give it the painting so that it can be shown in East Berlin.[3] The painting is

3 Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Zentralarchiv (SMB-ZA), VA 5592, W. Geismeier an W. Beyreuther, 16 July 1969.

thus offered to the National Gallery,[4] whose first decision is to immediately send it to Sweden "for the occasion of the GDR recognition week."[5]

But the painting is mainly circulated within the Soviet Bloc, as it responds to the issues troubling the bloc in the early 1970s. For example, it is sent to Sofia in 1973 on the occasion of the first triennial of realist painting, an event that brings together 562 paintings by 325 artists from the USSR, Poland, the GDR, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania, Cuba, and the Mongolian Republic. The triennial was one of the international meetings to flourish throughout the Soviet world following the Moscow Exhibition of the Art of Socialist Countries in 1958–59.[6] Among many others, we can mention the Krakow festival of graphic arts (founded in 1964), Intergrafik in East Berlin (1965), the Stettin biennial of paintings from socialist countries (1967) or the international meetings in Nyíregyháza. These are events that have been forgotten today, but at the time they were valued by certain artists.[7]

The geographic reach of these meetings is evident: this is about counterbalancing West European and North American events and turning the Socialist bloc into an alternative area for circulation. At the same time, it is about building a new socialist realism. Far from becoming obsolete with the death of Stalin and the thawing of relations, the idea of socialist realism remains in certain countries the object of intense debates, which raise new references—authorized and common to the entire bloc—such as Brecht and Mayakovsky. This undertaking, started in 1959 in Moscow, looks for new ways of combining realism and socialism. This is repeated by the Bulgarian art critic Dimitar Avramov in the speech he delivers at the opening of the Sofia triennial in 1973.[8] "For some fifteen years, since the discrediting of cultural normativism and the pseudo-realist apparatus, research has concentrated on elaborating a genuine realism in a context where realism is no longer the dominant current,

4 Ibid. Übergabesprotokoll des Bundesvorstandes FDGB zu SMB, 5 September 1969.

5 Ibid. W. Geismeier an W. Beyreuther, 25 March 1970.

6 Susan E. Reid, "The Exhibition *Art of Socialist Countries*, Moscow 1958–9, and the Contemporary Style of Painting," in *Style and Socialism: Modernity and Material Culture in Post-War Eastern Europe*, ed. Susan E. Reid and David Crowley (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 101–32.

7 In 1987, an artist sends a petition to the union of artists asking why he was not invited to the Sofia Triennial of Realist Painting and the Stettin Biennial of Paintings from Socialist Countries. The artist orders the union to explain "how it is decided who can exhibit and which festivals we are sent to." Archiv der Akademie der Künste (AAdK), Verband Bildender Künstler (VBK) Bezirksvorstand Dresden no. 21.

8 A German translation of this speech was found in the estate of Willi Sitte. Deutsches Kunstarchiv, Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nachlass Sitte (VBK, 1973–74).

but a current among others." *Neuererdiskussion* fits perfectly into this perspective; while it remains within the bosom of socialism (it asserts unambiguously the superiority of socialist democracy), it keeps its distance from the themes of the Zhdanov era, which preferred saboteurs in the dock to discussion groups. Formally, while remaining realist, the painting moves away from the Stalinist canons, albeit in the background where the colors and forms mix indistinctly; the body of the man with the cigarette and the disproportionately long fingers disappear into the background, his right shoulder merging into the red, brown, and white swirls.

There is one point that is not called into question when socialist realism is rebuilt on new foundations, and that is the national question. In tacitly reproducing the Zhdanovist watchword that wanted a realism that was "national in its form and socialist in its content," the international exhibitions insist on national traditions. Moreover, they are organized into national sections and do not seek to group together works according to transnational themes. This is proof that these international encounters do not necessarily result in national definitions being called into question; on the contrary, they may well confirm them. The other issue addressed by Avramov in his 1973 speech is the distinctive features of each country's artistic production. He speaks of "the historical destinies, the various stages of economic, cultural, and artistic development, the hegemony of one tradition or the other, the influence of regional models, the different possibilities of knowing about foreign models and making them one's own." The taste of Soviet artists for all things monumental, the influence of medieval icons among Bulgarian artists, the legacy of colorism in Poland as well as its opening up to the West, and the renewal in Hungary of the agitation art of the Republic of Councils in 1919 would all be relevant contexts to explain the works. However, on this point, *Neuererdiskussion* does not correspond exactly to what is expected. Whereas the paintings of the other German artists present in Sofia illustrate "German traditions" (verism calling to mind Otto Dix,[9] romanticism evoking C. D. Friedrich,[10] or expressionism recalling Corinth[11]), Neubert offers forms that are foreign to the traditions. He is also unaware of what has been built

9 Willi Sitte, *Die Überlebenden*, 1963, polyptych, 325 x 350 cm, Galerie der Neuen Meister Dresden.
10 Wolfgang Mattheuer, *Bratsker Landschaft*, 1967, oil on canvas, 96 x 118 cm, Nationalgalerie Berlin.
11 Bernhard Heisig, *Brigadier*, 1970, oil on canvas, 120 x 120 cm, Museum für bildende Künste Leipzig.

up as the German realist tradition (Menzel, Leibl, Liebermann). One East German critic likes to compare his paintings to the work of Max Beckmann (another important starting point for the construction of German tradition in the GDR), however, this is hardly convincing.[12] The drawings of the figures in *Neuererdiskussion* remind us much more of GDR propaganda posters or the large public frescoes, of which Neubert himself is one of the specialists (with the foundries in Thale, he perfected several techniques for painting on enamel, which he uses for major public works in Thale, Halle, and Suhl). The figures' features are individualized, but this individualization is kept to a minimum (the face of the man who is smoking thus amounts to a few brushstrokes). The composition is simple; it is easy to interpret this one action. The red and blue colors strongly recall the colors of the enamel panels that Neubert developed at the Thale foundries. In an original way in the socialist context, the painting undermines at the same time the idea of national tradition and the idea of grand art created in isolation of ordinary images. By circulating in Eastern Europe, the painting conveys an unexpected understanding of internationalism in art.

Neuererdiskussion invites people to move closer not only to the ordinary images that exist in the GDR, but also to a contemporary work that comes neither from East Germany nor the Soviet Bloc: *La Discussione* by the Italian Renato Guttuso from 1959 (Plate 14.2). From one painting to the next, we see the same discussion group depicted from a slightly high angle, with the same composition around a white diagonal separating the interlocutors. This resemblance comes to confirm the theory that socialist realism from the West was, in brother countries, just as important, if not more important, than socialist realism from the East.[13] But the context into which *La Discussione* is born in 1959 is quite different from that of *Neuererdiskussion*. It is the result of a long series of drawings begun in 1956.[14] These drawings are devoted to political discussions at the core of the Italian Communist Party after the

12 Ullrich Kuhirt, *Willi Neubert* (Leipzig: Seemann Verlag, 1969).

13 Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius, "How the West Corroborated Socialist Realism in the East: Fougeron, Taslitzky and Picasso in Warsaw," *Biuletyn Historii Sztuki* 65:2 (2003): 303–329. In the case of Guttuso, circulating work turns out to be very complex as Guttuso himself is working in permanent collaboration with certain Moscow artists. See *Guttuso e i suoi contemporanei russi. Dal realismo sociale al realismo socialista* (Museo della Arti–Palazzo Bandera Busto Arsizio, 1995).

14 Enrico Crispolti, *Guttuso nel disegno* (Rome: Edizioni Oberon, 1983).

Soviet army's repression of the Hungarian uprising, an event that profoundly divided Togliatti's party.[15] The figure stood to the left is, in fact, a self-portrait of Guttuso who approved of the Soviet intervention and who had great difficulties defending this position before other intellectuals. The painting mixes several debates, as we can see, next to the newspaper headlines carrying the words *Mosca* or *proletario*, near to the ashtray a reproduction of Fernand Léger's *La Grande parade sur fond rouge* (1953) or the cover of an edition of *Isskustvo*, the leading Soviet art journal that circulates throughout communist Europe. It is difficult to know how much of the political acuteness of the painting is noticed in the GDR. The fact remains that the painting is well known there and will come to confirm the reputation of its creator, who is considered from the end of the 1940s as one of the most important creators of a realist, modern, antiformalist and partisan form of art.[16] But after having been exhibited at the Venice Biennale, *La Discussione* was purchased in 1960 by the Tate Gallery in London so that, when the retrospective on Guttuso's work is exhibited in 1967 in East Berlin and Leipzig,[17] this painting cannot be included, which is lamented publicly by the organizers.[18] Neubert therefore, who has not traveled to the West, only knows the painting from reproductions and through the few studies that come from the GDR, such as *Discussione politica*.[19]

Art critics in the GDR did not fail to see the similarities between the two paintings, but they tried hard to point out the differences. Guttuso's painting belonged to a capitalist society under pressure from the interests of the antagonist classes, whereas the second painting was seen as the expression of a socialist society in which the social strata worked together to build socialism. In the first painting, "the discussion serves to strengthen the class front in the fight against the ideological enemy; it is about fundamental class issues. The discussion group in Neubert's painting, on the other hand, reflects the col-

15 Alexander Höbel, ed., *Il PCI e il 1956. Scritti e documenti dal XX Congresso del PCUS ai fatti di Ungheria* (Napoli: La Citta del Sole, 2006).

16 The painting by Guttuso entitled *Occupazione delle terre incolte in Sicilia* from 1948 is presented in the GDR as the symbolic work bringing together all of these qualities. It is acquired by the Academy of Arts of East Berlin in 1949 and lent to the Museum of Dresden to become part of its permanent collection.

17 *Renato Gussuto. Gemälde, Aquarelle, Zeichnungen aus den Jahren 1940 bis 1966* (National Gallery of East Berlin, 1967).

18 Peter H. Feist, "Zum neueren Schaffen Renato Gussuto," *Bildende Kunst* 7 (1967): 294–98.

19 Renato Gussuto, *Discussione politica*, 1957, 39 x 50 cm, study by brush, pen, and Indian ink, Busto Arsizio.

lective effort to strengthen the power of the working class and thus reflects a much more advanced stage in the historical process."[20]

However, more than the differences, it is the shared problems that we find interesting. Let us consider the white diagonal at the center of both paintings. In both cases, there are incongruous signs that appear: the newspapers in Guttuso's painting, the industrial sketches in Neubert's. Guttuso has glued pieces of newspaper to the canvas. Moreover, there are plenty of other elements in the painting that call to mind the cubist aesthetic, such as the depiction of white rectangles of irregular shape in the top right-hand corner, or the grayish-ochre tone of the whole painting. In *Neuererdiskussion* this kind of aesthetic cannot be found, but the industrial sketches seem nonetheless to be equally strange. They stand out from the untidy mass of papers and the salient angles. In other words, in both cases, the very objects of the debate (international topical events on the one hand and improvements to production on the other) are given special treatment in relation to the realist representation of the whole. The object of the debate is like a stranger to the painting, as though it were breaking away from each of the interlocutors.

And it is worth lingering a while over the effect produced by this diagonal. In his studies—some of which were sent to East Berlin and Leipzig in 1967—Guttuso endlessly reworked in various ways the line that separates the interlocutors. In *La Discussione*, this line is very much a fracture in the composition, casting doubt over the possibility of harmony between the various opinions. On the top left-hand side there is a man who is unaware of the scene, arms crossed and body slumped on the table, perhaps tired of the endless conversations or resigned to the vacuity of the disputes. In *Neuererdiskussion*, the fracture is less clear-cut and everyone is paying attention to what is being said. The person who is talking, unlike the other protagonists, is not really at the table, his body is out in front, at the center of the attention. Yet the diagonal clearly marks a barrier between engineers and workers; it displays a social frontier within the image of several levels of society in solidarity with each other. The speech is not hindered or thwarted; it is much more the case that it has to cover the entire expanse of the social space. As a result, the diagonal marks, in both cases, the irreconcilable element estranging the interlocu-

20 Kuhirt, *Willi Neubert*, 14.

tors from one another. Both Neubert and Guttuso thus contribute to the rich socialist iconography of the conflictual discussion, which was already present in the interwar period, for example in the works of Kouzma Petrov-Vodkin[21] or Lea Grundig.[22]

If the issue of verbal exchange and its limits is one of the major subjects of realism in socialist countries, this is in part because the exercise of art is linked in these countries to a whole series of discussion practices. "Realism" is not just the name of a form, but also the name of a new economy of art, resting on the involvement of people who are foreign to the worlds of art. This is what has enabled socialist realism to be perceived as eminently modern (and the various avant-gardes as conservative, as they renew the social division of roles). Again, the problem arises both locally and internationally. From one point of communist Europe to another, the imperial and vague views of Lenin are repeated (or, more precisely, those that Clara Zetkin borrowed from Lenin): "Art belongs to the people. It must lay down its roots as deeply as possible in the heart of the working masses. It must be understood and loved by them."[23]

The sacred moment for an encounter between artists and workers is the commission. The idea of the commission in socialist countries is to involve factory employees in artistic creation; they thus rise to the status of sponsor that was previously reserved for the powerful. Under the supervision of the union and sometimes the party cell within the company, the commissioned artist has to work in collaboration with a "social partner" to whom he has to present his projects, then sketches, and finally the finished work. A study of how commissions were actually carried out in the GDR shows that artists were often able to evade collaborating with their social partners, as commissions often took the form of disguised sales. But this was not the case with the commissions that Neubert created in Thale in the 1960s and 1970s. The Thale union's commission contracts reveal the commitment to the "joint work that is carried out through the organization of debates and discussions between the artist and the collective."[24] They lay down very clearly the specific condi-

21 Kouzma Petrov-Vodkin, *Rabočie*, 1926, oil on canvas, 97 x 106 cm, Russian Museum of Saint Petersburg.

22 Lea Grundig, *Diskussion auf der Strasse zwischen SPD-Arbeitern und KPD-Arbeitern*, 1930, linocut, 26.8 x 36.2 cm, Deutsches Historisches Museum Berlin.

23 Clara Zetkin, *Erinnerungen an Lenin* (East Berlin: Dietz, 1961). Original edition 1925.

24 AAdK, VBK Bezirksvorstand Halle, no. 52, contract between the union and Willi Neubert, 3 January 1968.

tions of joint work: the associated brigade and the exact dates of meetings are stated clearly. "If the piece is not accepted, because the artist has not heeded the advice given or has not given the work the desired quality, the amount already paid will be the only fee paid for the work" (and the total amount initially planned will not be paid). The accounts of the meetings have not been found, but it may be the case that the profusion of colors in *Neuererdiskussion* is a response to the requests of the brigade, as the use of color was one of the most frequent requests.

There are numerous accounts of the difficulty in finding a common language between artists and "social partners." And so it was that in 1971, at the Thale foundries, one of the factory officials wrote a report concerning the creation of a fresco by Neubert, associated to a group made up of eighteen production workers, three foremen, three employees, three engineers and two apprentices.[25]

> The collective to which Neubert is associated has regularly visited him in his atelier and shows an interest in the process of creating the work. . . . However, as the discussions have progressed, it has become increasingly clear that a political and ideological conscience is the only thing to rise to the surface here. The capacity for judgment, which must emerge from the commission system strengthened, does not yet include the judgment of taste. . . . Most workers do not claim to be sponsors. Only when they are asked whether they feel involved in the work of Willi Neubert do they agree and speak about the way in which they have participated in the production of the work.

To explain why these exchanges between the artist and the collective are often laborious, the report also highlights the workers' inhibitions before the pictures, and their reluctance to make judgments concerning taste (the possible political reluctance to take part in an activity organized by the union is not mentioned here).

Confronted by such problems, artists such as Neubert can look beyond their country's borders for points of comparison. The international scene be-

25 AAdK, VBK Bezirksvorstand Halle, no. 124, "Projektierung und Entwicklung neuer Techniken durch Willi Neubert in Zusammenarbeit mit dem EHW (1971)."

comes a space where answers to supposedly common problems are sought. This opportunity is provided by delegation exchanges (in which Neubert participates as a member of the local leadership of the artists' union and the local leadership of the party). The goals set for delegation exchanges were to establish links between artists' unions in different countries and to gain a better understanding of the art of like-minded countries. These trips involve presents and purchases, which establish an economic circulation of art within communist Europe.[26] These exchanges take the form of twinnings between regions that become institutionalized during the course of the 1960s and 1970s. The *Bezirk* of Halle is thus twinned with the Republic of Bashkortostan, the *województwo* of Katowice in Poland, the Veszprém *megye* in Hungary and the West Slovak *kraj* in Czechoslovakia. But the trips can also be used by artists and officials to observe how the confrontation with workers is organized in other countries. In 1974, for example, an East German delegation travels to Katowice in Poland (where they present a gift of a cycle of engravings entitled *Lenin and the unions*), then to the Felix Dzerzhinsky factory in Tarnow, to which the German factory in Leuna is associated.[27] A company exhibition is organized here bringing together 6,900 employees who are shown socialist realist works (by Willi Neubert, Willi Sitte, Dieter Rex, Hans Rothe, etc.) and works belonging to a less partisan realism (Carl Marx, Otto Möhwald, etc.). One official from the Halle district council reports that the East Germans "immediately sought to organize a discussion—in which our delegation was to take part—of Polish artists and the factory workers."[28] But the Polish officials are reluctant. "The president of the artists' union did not take seriously this desire to hold a discussion. She declared essentially that Polish artists paint as they see fit, in a realist or abstract manner." We cannot know the extent to which the East German official, in his translation, distorts the views of the union president and why the latter puts a stop to any exchange. It is true that the GDR and Poland, geographical-

26 The archives of the VBK in Halle, for example, provide the details of the organization of an exhibition in Bulgaria of five young East German artists who were still little known in 1972. The five painters decide which works can be sold and determine the prices. The five artists can expect earnings of 2,780, 7,900, 9,100, 9,730 and 13,700 marks respectively. AAdK VBK Bezirksvorstand Halle, no. 5.

27 Landeshauptarchiv Sachsen-Anhalt (LHASA), Leuna-Werke 27731, "Protokoll über die 6. Sitzung der Beratergruppe zur Durchsetzung der Auftragskonzeption am 27 June 1974."

28 LHASA Rat des Bezirkes Halle, no. 6606, "Information," 26 August 1974.

ly close but opposed in the spectrum of cultural socialist policies, offer situations that are not easily compared in reality. However, this case is a testament to a desire on the part of East Germans, such as Neubert, to observe in other countries things that pose problems at home.

In many ways, the international uses that are given to a painting such as *Neuererdiskussion* (its circulation in international exhibitions in the bloc, the dialogue in which it engages with a painting by Guttuso, its use in discussions with workers in other countries) rest every time on the local context in which it is born. We can thus follow the various paths that lead to the universalization of the image of a company meeting. But we must look carefully at what is universalized: in each case, the relationship between the social groups is at the center of attention, the breakdown of social relations, heavy with tensions and conflicts.

In 1970, Neubert is coeditor of a book devoted to socialist realism.[29] Alongside the usual considerations concerning the Marxist–Leninist aesthetic, socialist humanism, or indeed the decadent art of late Western bourgeoisie, the issue of conflict in socialist realism is addressed. The excerpt really tries to justify the conflict and social contradictions for artistic creation, including in the socialist world; "all realist art is carried by genuine conflicts." However, the text remains politically very orthodox and reaffirms the importance of the party through which the conflicts are supposed to be resolved and thanks to which the antagonisms will disappear. The persistence of antagonisms: Neubert cannot write about this, and he would certainly not have used these words, but he experiments with it, he paints it and he makes it resonate with other works and other artistic practices in communist Europe.

29 Willi Neubert and Erwin Pracht, eds., *Sozialistischer Realismus—Positionen, Probleme, Perspektiven. Eine Einführung* (East Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1970), 173–82.

15

Socialist Realism in Greece (1944–67)

Costas Baroutas

From 1917 onward, Greek artists began to take an interest in Soviet art, initially called proletarian art, then socialist realism from 1932. The social messages of the October Revolution and the images of workers' battles, social revolutions, demonstrations, strikes, and more generally the life of workers and farmers provided inspiration for many artists and students of the Athens School of Fine Arts throughout the 1920s and 1930s. The advocates of proletarian and communist art at that time primarily used engraving, which was considered to be the best propaganda medium for socialist ideas and also the most accessible medium—they thus picked up on an insight found in the USSR and elsewhere in communist Europe. Not until a few years into the 1930s did proletarian artists stop portraying just what was happening in the USSR and turn to the social and political reality in Greece—an evolution that is evident in the reproductions found in their review entitled *Neoi Protoporoi* (The new avant-gardists), where they published articles and reproductions, in particular engravings. The proletarian artists did not manage to exhibit their work until 1932 onward, but the installation of the Metaxas dictatorship in 1936 seriously limited their opportunities, and these artists resorted to genre and landscape paintings.

The emergence of Soviet art caused a deep divide in the world of the avant-garde between, on the one hand, those who were enthusiastic about the Soviet cause (about thirty or so artists in Athens) and, on the other hand, the "bourgeois" avant-garde. The former wanted to follow—sometimes to the point of fanaticism—the ideology and aesthetic of the "major socialist party," whereas the latter looked toward Paris, which remained in their eyes the place where the most interesting artistic creations were appearing and where the repertoire of forms continued to develop. In both cases, the idea of creating "truly Greek" art had no place—their objective was to be part of what was happening in Moscow or in Paris.

So what did Greek artists know about Soviet art? The decisive event in the history of socialist realism in Greece was the exhibition of Soviet engravings in Athens in 1934. This was the key moment of confrontation with Soviet art. The works exhibited defined for everyone what is known as Soviet socialist realism, whether it be revered or rejected. This is the art that was henceforth called socialist realism.

The socialist realism of the end of the 1940s was, in reality, the continuation of the art created during the fight against fascist Italy in the northwest of the country (October 1940–April 1941) and during the Nazi occupation (April 1941–October 1944).

Socialist realism appeared to be quite suited to accompany the patriotic and victorious war against the Italians, in which all social classes took part. And as a result, the artists that were formerly bourgeois reclaimed socialist realism in order to galvanize the people and the soldiers. The engravings of the most prominent proletarian artists (Tassos, Grammatopoulos, Katraki, Dimou, and Velissaridis) were reproduced on posters and in newspapers.

During the occupation of the country by the Nazi army, the number of socialist realist images fell sharply. The conditions for creating such works were, of course, much more difficult. But what is more, this art seemed to be less suited to portraying the sufferings of this period, the famines of 1941 and 1942, the destruction of hundreds of villages, summary executions—in short, the violence of the occupation of which we now know the full extent. The style of socialist realism and its fanatical optimism did not correspond, in the eyes of many people, to the demands of the time. This is why a great many artists moved toward expressionism, as is demonstrated by the en-

gravings of former socialist realists, such as Kefallinos, Korogiannakis, and Kanellis. Nonetheless, socialist realism survived among certain artists who were directly involved in the secret armed resistance. Indeed, dozens of artists were members of secret resistance organizations: Megalidis, Semertzidis, Maggiorou, Fertis, Katsikogianni, Gioldasis, Makris, etc. Many works and secret newspapers contained engravings inspired by the resistance. Once again, the use of socialist realism was for artists with differing political opinions. And from 1943 and the end of the Battle of Stalingrad, the victories of the Red Army provided a large number of artistic themes, some of which were neither communist nor pro-Soviet. The form of socialist realism was being used more than ever before for its capacity to translate a militant and revolutionary spirit.

The realism of battle was at the fore of the artistic scene as soon as the Nazi occupiers retreated in October 1944. Works that had been clandestine during the occupation were then quickly shown. Several images inspired by the resistance were reproduced in left-wing newspapers, such as *Rizospastis* (Radical), *Eleftheri Ellada* (Free Greece—the official newspaper of the Greek Communist Party) and *Elefthera Grammata* (Free letters). In 1945, the engraver A. Tassos portrayed the episode of Gorgopotamos, where in 1943 the Greek resistance blew up a railway line leading to Athens; the wood engraving was supposed to be similar to a wood engraving by the Soviet artist Alexander Kratschenko entitled *To the Barricades.* The majority of these works belonged from a stylistic point of view to the socialist realist style and were heavily influenced by the Soviet art shown in 1934. But it must be noted that what the Greek artists proclaimed to be Soviet art after 1944 bears in reality little resemblance to what was being done in the USSR during the same period, at the time of triumphant Zhdanovism.

Following the bloody clashes in the streets of Athens in December 1944 between the people and the government army supported by the English forces, the art of the resistance—which had previously risen above ideological or party divisions—became increasingly engaged in serving the political program of the Communist Party. This style became the marker of party affiliation. This was the paradox: socialist realism was widely used when the battle went beyond the communist context (in 1940–44) and it was weakened when the battle became a truly communist battle. But socialist realism be-

Figure 15.1.
Alebisos Tassos, *Gorgopotamos*, 1945,
woodcut, 24,5×19 cm.

came partially nationalized—the engravings that A. Tassos dedicated to the funeral march of the people of Athens following the massacres of December 1944 multiplied the national Greek symbols.

An examination of the thirty exhibitions organized in Athens during the period 1945–47 reveals five major tendencies in the artistic world of the time. The first tendency was the continuation of academic realism, which took its cue from the Munich School of the late nineteenth century. The second claimed to be inspired by popular art and the Byzantine style and wanted to create an art that picked up on such "traditions," that is to say, to create an authentically Greek art, a relatively new approach in the artistic landscape.

Thirdly, we find the artists who were faithful to Soviet socialist realism—the majority were members of the Communist Party and of the E.A.M. resistance group (National Liberation Front). The fourth group consisted of artists who were known as modernist and bourgeois and who looked to Western Europe. The fifth group brought together those who saw their place in the communist ideology and in the image of the engaged artist (and who were often former members of the anti-Nazi resistance), but who refused to follow the path of socialist realism and instead followed the path of modern art. Many artists who belonged to the Communist Party did not follow the artistic orders of the Greek Communist Party (formulated by Secretary-General Zachariadis in January 1947) or the views of Zhdanov that were published then.

The division of the exhibitions between the five groups shows the predominance, in terms of quantity and quality, of the latter two groups and their modernist works. For example, at the exhibition organized by the French Institute of Athens in June 1946, the works that characterized the contemporaries the most were those by artists who were ideologically on the left but who borrowed the stylistic viewpoint of the modernist paths. The socialist re-

Figure 15.2.
Georges Dimou, *Makronisos*, no date, drawing, 11,7×48,1 cm.

alists (Fertis, Theodoridis, Ferentinos, Apergis, Kontopoulos, Kanas, Zepos, and Katraki, etc.) were marginalized. The art critic Al. Xydis, who was of a socialist leaning, launched an attack against these artists, who, in his view, were placing their art in the service of political ends.

The number of communist artists—whether socialist realists or modernists—reduced considerably between 1947 and 1949. Conditions became increasingly difficult. Measures targeting communists (arrests, expulsions, sometimes even executions) increased in number following Law 509 of 1947, which outlawed the Communist Party and the left-wing anti-Nazi resistance organizations. In *Makronisos*, G. Dimou portrayed the repression suffered by the communists on the island of Makronisos, the main center of detention and torture for the communists. In these conditions, many artists abandoned the communist cause. These are the reasons why they abandoned the dream of a revolutionary transformation of Greek society and resigned themselves to compromises—both political and artistic—with the new pictorial movements. Former leftists joined the bourgeois and took part alongside them in art exhibitions. In reality, very few artists remained faithful to the socialist realist style, then known as the "Moscow School."

Migrations, most often forced, also contributed to the profound changes in the intellectual landscape and in the balance between artistic tendencies. The youngest and the most modernist artists chose exile in France and Paris, often with the help of the French Institute in Athens. The realists mostly chose to settle in people's democracies. The painter and engraver Georges Dimou settled in Bucharest in 1948. The sculptor Memos Makris migrated to Budapest. His capacity to adapt expressionism to the context of socialist realism made him one of the most celebrated sculptors of the Hungarian regime. In 1959, he was given the task of creating a monument dedicated to the Hungarian Republic of Councils of March–August 1919. He was also tasked in 1964 with creating a monument at the Mauthausen concentration camp in Austria to commemorate the suffering of the Hungarian deportees.

As a result, socialist realism had largely disappeared from the artistic landscape by the time the communists laid down their arms in 1949. Those who defended this form of art either rejected it or left Greece. It is important to recall that the most important Greek abstract painter after 1949, Alekos Kontopoulos, started by creating works of socialist realism when he was a communist.

After the wave of terror that followed the civil war, the violence of the measures against socialists and communists abated somewhat. The repression tended to remove the divisions between modernist communists and realist communists. The appearance of the left-wing newspaper *Avgi* (The Dawn) in 1952 and of the journal *Epitheorisi Technis* (Art review) in 1954 provided artists, theoreticians, and art critics who were formerly socialists and communists the opportunity to regain a public voice. The articles and the reproductions printed in the review suggest that there was a degree of popular nostalgia for socialist realism at that time. Also published were articles on artists or art critics living in the USSR or in one of the popular democracies. Inversely, it often judged the art created in Western Europe very severely. The newly founded review entitled *Kainourgia Epochi* (New era) published, in 1956, the translation of a controversy on Soviet art, including opinions (some negative, some positive) on socialist realism. It was an exhibition of art from the people's democracies that provided the opportunity to discuss this art. An exhibition that took place in Athens in 1960 must be mentioned here, in which forty-two Romanian artists participated, contributing seventy-one works of art. All of these works, in terms of their themes and their style, belonged to socialist realism and received favorable reviews from the art critics at the left-wing newspaper *Avgi*. These few articles must not overshadow the fact that the production of socialist realist works in Greece remained nonexistent. When the sixth national art exhibition was held in 1960, among the 1,084 images exhibited, none could in any way be seen as belonging to socialist realism.

Moreover, these left-wing reviews took a stance—in the same vein as the vast majority of Greek artists and intellectuals—against the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956; even the procommunist review *Epitheorisi Technis* published very critical articles on the subject. The majority of authors welcomed the declaration of de-Stalinization in the Soviet Union, but they quickly became disappointed by the implementation of the decisions of the Twentieth Congress, which, in their view, did not bring about any real changes in terms of artistic policy and did not ensure the freedom of artists. In October 1957, however, *Epitheorisis Technis* dedicated an edition to the fortieth anniversary of the October Revolution and praised its greatness. This resulted in the review being condemned by the Greek regime for procommunist propa-

ganda. It is important to recall that the other art reviews presented a much more negative image of the October Revolution. At the same time, the right-wing review *Nea Estia* (New Hestia) stated that the revolution had harmed the development of the arts and that the Soviet regime had put an end to the Russian avant-garde.

It should also be pointed out that international meetings were held in Greece, to which artists from the popular democracies were invited. The Fourth International Congress of Aesthetics took place in Athens in September 1960. One notable participant was Chvatik Kvetoslav, a member of the Institute of Philosophy of the Academy of Sciences in Prague, who spoke of the "aesthetic value and the social function of art." Another notable attendee was Dostal Vladimir, a member of the same academy, who presented "the founders of the Czech Marxist aesthetic in the face of the modern art issue." It was likely that the participants from Eastern Europe were able to express themselves more freely on the issue of the Marxist aesthetic than their Greek colleagues.

After 1956, in the context of diplomatic relations between Greece and the Soviet Union, some artistic and cultural exchanges took place. Soviet intellectuals were invited to Greece, such as Ilya Ehrenburg in 1957. During a public interview, Ehrenburg recalled the major axes of communist cultural policy and repeated the attacks against abstract art and modernist art in general, characterizing the paintings of Salvador Dalí as "academic," for example. In December 1957, on the initiative of the Greek–Soviet organization, an exhibition of Soviet artists took place in Athens presenting watercolors, engravings, and sketches. It was the first Soviet exhibition since 1934. According to Greek art critics, these works were characterized by the socialist realist style, the "academic style," which nonetheless demonstrated real technical skill and sometimes humor, especially the works of Pimenov, Ratzev, Wereski, Favorski, and Litvinenko.

Moreover, Greek artists traveled to the USSR: in 1960, nine Greek engravers and painters, including Katraki, Tassos, Theodoropoulos, Giannakakis, Grammatopoulos, Varlamos, Montesantou, Nicolis, and Konstantinidou, went to Moscow and exhibited their work. Greek socialist realist creations—invisible in Greece—became public once again on this occasion in Soviet territory. In the exhibition catalog, Soviet art critics evaluated these

creations; some artists found their favor (Tassos, Katraki, Grammatopoulos, and Montesantou), whereas others appeared to them to be too far from what they considered to be the goal of art—the "real and profound" portrayal of reality.

From the beginning of the 1960s until the installation of the Colonels' dictatorship in 1967, socialist realism made a cautious comeback. The political climate was less unfavorable to it, especially after the electoral defeat of the right in 1962. The growing number of demonstrations and strikes provided the material for the images. At the national exhibition of art in 1963, realist works reappeared. But the renaissance was most obvious in the area of intellectual Marxism. Texts were published in Greece that characterized the debates of the time throughout the communist world: an *Aesthetic* treaty published by the Academy of Sciences of the Soviet Union, the writings of Georg Lukács, *The Necessity of Art* by Ernst Fischer and *Realism without Shores* by Roger Garaudy. The review *Epitheorisi Technis* started to take the side of socialist realism increasingly openly. But the main exhibition area remained the Soviet Bloc, with which diplomatic-cultural exchanges became a common occurrence. The painter Semertzidis held no less than twenty-five exhibitions in the Soviet Union in the 1960s.

Young artists were aware of the social problems, but they did not want to become involved in the same way as the older communists. They practiced a style that could be called critical realism. Nonetheless, they most often looked down upon the artists who had remained true to socialist realism, whether they were in exile, in prison or in contact with the socialist camp.

The establishment of the military dictatorship in 1967 marked the return of arrests and exile for left-wing intellectuals. As a result, images of imprisonment and exile, which had been a recurrent theme in the socialist realism of previous years, returned in abundance. The return of socialist realism also owed a great deal to the international situation—to the return of political representation on the one hand, and to social uprisings such as those of May 1968 and the antimilitarist demonstrations in the United States on the other. Older artists—former partisans of socialist realism, such as Tassos, Semertzidis, and Katsikogiannis—revived the militant force of the style and explored the recent history of Greece (the Turkish intervention in Cyprus or the Colonels' dictatorship), as well as international events, such as the assassination of

Che Guevara or the Vietnam War.

The fall of the military dictatorship in 1974 brought with it a number of changes in the political, social, and cultural life of Greece. The most important of the decisions taken was the authorization—after twenty-seven years underground—of the Greek Communist Party. The communist newspaper *Rizospastis* (The Radical) and the *Communist Review* also reappeared, and several refugees and exiles returned to the country. The old socialist realist artists remained faithful to their habitual style, but the majority of them mixed socialist realism with various modernist styles, without abandoning their political and ideological orientation and their loyalty toward Moscow. One could mention here the revolutionary spirit that several works by the sculptors Apergis, Loukopoulos, and Zoggolopoulos tried to inspire—with the main subject being memories of the resistance. The Greek public was thus able to see these creations that had previously remained underground and unknown: the works were exhibited at the Athens National Gallery, but also in a number of private galleries.

Following the fall of the dictatorship, many exhibitions from socialist countries were shown in Greece. The most important were those held at the Athens National Gallery, such as that dedicated to Romanian art in 1984 and organized in collaboration with the congress of civilization and socialist education and the union of artists of Romania. Two other exhibitions were held at the Athens National Gallery: in 1985, the GDR sent an exhibition of engravings, and in 1986 Yugoslavia showcased contemporary art created in this neighboring but little-known country. Other less prestigious venues also exhibited artists from socialist countries (in 1987, the Municipal Gallery of Athens exhibited the Albanian sculptor Odysseas Paschalis and the Bulgarian painter and engraver Kalin Balev).

But it was in the images sponsored directly by the Greek Communist Party that socialist realist forms remained most visible. The political posters and banners carried by demonstrators on a number of marches that shook Athens and other Greek towns in the 1970s and 1980s were the most important media for the endurance of socialist realism in Greece—proof that this art continues to draw its strength from political activism.

16

Constructive-Concrete Art in the GDR, Poland, and Hungary

Doris Hartmann

From the outset in the avant-garde of the early twentieth century, constructive-concrete art was international. As an artistic expression that should not refer to nature, sensuousness, or emotion in its formal appearance (i.e., to be of purely mental origin, and only using the basic elements of painting—line, color and space), it spread over Europe and influenced several artists in the 1930s. This proliferation was promoted by the emigration of artists, at first from Russia in connection with the fundamental political changes after Josef Stalin came to power and later by the *Machtübernahme* (seizure of power) of the Nazis. Since in both totalitarian systems the constructive-concrete art was no longer accepted as an artistic expression or defamed as decadent just because of formal aspects, its development in these countries and in all occupied ones was interrupted, while it developed continuously at least in the western parts of Europe. But no later than the beginning of the 1950s, the postulate of socialist realism applied to East-Central European countries and "the goal of concrete art … to create objects for mental use, just as man develops objects for material usage"[1]

1 Max Bill, "Vom Sinn der Begriffe in der neuen Kunst," in *Konkrete Kunst. Manifeste und Künstlertexte. Studienbuch I*, ed. Margit Weinberg-Staber (Zürich: Stiftung für konstruktive und konkrete Kunst, 2001), 50.

opposed the demands of this postulate diametrically. This is why the preconditions for artistic work in the field of constructive-concrete art became very much dependent on the cultural policy in these countries. Nevertheless, numerous artists devoted themselves to the field of constructivism and concrete art in all countries of the Eastern Bloc.

Just as the following comparison of developments in the GDR, Poland, and Hungary will reveal, not only did the possibilities to deal with the historical background of this art movement, to act artistically self-employed or to exhibit in public vary in these countries, but so did the chances of artistic exchange within the bloc and with noncommunist European countries.

There was a strong tradition in constructive-concrete art in Germany, Poland, and Hungary. In Hungary it was connected with artists such as Vilmos Huszár, László Moholy-Nagy, and Sándor Bortnyik, and in Poland with groups of artists such as BLOK, praesens or group a.r. In contrast, Germany in the 1920s and 1930s was more a place of artistic exchange or a station of Eastern European artists on their way through the artistic centers of the time. In a manifold manner artists socialized with other artists in Berlin, e.g., in the Galerie Der Sturm, at the Bauhaus in Dessau or at the International Congress of Constructivists and Dadaists in Weimar in 1922.

It was the aim of several artists who returned to their native country at the end of World War II and the artistic suppression by the Nazis to connect with this tradition. This was especially so in the first years after the war, which were characterized by an emerging spirit of optimism that seemed to offer a very liberal attitude toward all stylistic movements of the avant-garde, encouraging these artists in their intentions. Henryk Stażewski and Władysław Strzemiński, for example, had a great impact on the constructive-concrete art of the postwar period in Poland, whereas Lajos Kassák and Sándor Bortnyik became important role models and teachers of the postwar generation in Hungary. Even though it can be noted that increased government restrictions against nonfigurative art at the end of the 1940s led many artists to withdraw to privacy in all Eastern European countries, it was nonetheless possible to revive constructive-concrete art.

In East Germany, pluralism of figurative and abstract artistic styles was not able to survive the first years after the end of the war. With the beginning of the realist-formalist debate in 1948 it was displaced by the demand for re-

alistic works of art following the example of Soviet art. In addition, the rediscovery of constructivism and concrete art was made much more difficult by the predominance of expressionism in the 1940s.

Even the grand old master of constructive-concrete art in the GDR, Hermann Glöckner, was forced to earn his living with decorative works within architecture, while his work on the *Konstruktivistisches Tafelwerk*—a collection of constructive-concrete plates started in 1933—could only be developed in the isolation of his studio in Dresden-Loschwitz. And although Glöckner had been participating in exhibitions in the Federal Republic of Germany since the mid-1950s, his work remained almost unknown in the GDR until the end of the 1960s. This is why it cannot be said that he had a comparable influence on the younger generation, as has been noted for Stażewski in Poland and Kassák in Hungary. The same goes for other artists of the avant-garde who lived in the GDR at the time, including Otto Müller-Eibenstock, Franz Ehrlich, Kurt Schmidt, and Hajo Rose, to mention just a few.

In addition, the development of a constructive-concrete community in the GDR was also made more difficult by the disapproval of the Bauhaus tradition and its defamation as a "genuine child of American cosmopolitism"[2] by the officials. Therefore, artists such as Karl-Heinz Adler, Horst Bartnig, Friedrich Kracht, Wilhelm Müller, and Inge Thiess-Böttner—all belonging to the first postwar generation—came to deal with constructive-concrete art indirectly (Plate 16.1). But this also provided for a very individual kind of work and expression.

In contrast to some statements that were made after the fall of the Iron Curtain—that artists had to work in isolation during the existence of the regime and felt cut off not only from the international developments of concrete art, but also from other artists of that field within their own country—these artists always found a way to keep informed. As far as possible they used visits to obtain literature and pictures of the latest exhibitions and to establish contact with artists in order to facilitate further exchanges. However, the main exchanges occurred through the neighboring states in the East, especially through galleries, museums, and artists in Poland.

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2 Werner Schmidt, *Ausgebürgert. Künstler aus der DDR und dem sowjetischen Sektor Berlins 1949–1989* (Berlin: Argon Verlag, 1990), 48.

The extreme exclusion of constructive-concrete art from the art scene in the GDR is also made clear in the possibility of international exchanges in terms of exhibitions or the chance to participate in exhibitions. Not until the political conditions changed toward a broader reception of avant-garde art and the ongoing inclusion of constructive-concrete elements and forms to the applied arts in the 1960s by interpreting it as a "test of aesthetic design,"[3] were artists able to make their works public, not only in what were known as *flat galleries*. Due to a close-knit network of collectors and connoisseurs, and the occasional efforts of gallery owners and directors of museums (Gallery Arkade and the Cabinet of Art at the Institute of Teachers' Further Education in Berlin, Kupferstichkabinett in Dresden, and the Central Institute of Atomic Research in Rossendorf), artists became known to a broader public in the late 1970s. And with the exception of Hermann Glöckner and Horst Bartnig,[4] no constructive-concrete working artist from the GDR participated in any international exhibition before the mid-1980s.

After 1948, Polish territory was also Stalinized. In the arts, the movement known as *sozrealism* was enforced, which was partly connected with a "disruption of the avant-garde traditions, [and a] programmatic breakup of contacts with the international artistic community."[5] Anyhow, the strength of the influence of the USSR was unstable for a long time. For several reasons, mainly economic, opposition to the government grew and resulted in the Polish October of 1956. As a consequence of this historic event, Poland regained a certain amount of sovereignty under the leadership of Wladysław Gomulka and the process of liberalization set in.

This more liberal cultural policy applied, for example, to the continuation of the Muzeum Sztuki in Łódz and the steady extension of its collection with international works of art. It was founded in 1930, was strongly supported by group a.r., and became the place of a first-class collection of the international

3 Ulrike Goeschen, "Abstrakter Realismus—geht das? Zum theoretischen Umgang mit ungegenständlicher Kunst in der DDR," in *Abstraktion im Staatssozialismus. Feindsetzungen und Freiräume im Kunstsystem der DDR*, ed. Karl-Siegbert Rehberg and Paul Kaiser (Weimar: VDG, 2003), 139.

4 Glöckner exhibited from the 1950s in the FRG. Horst Bartnig participated in different print biennials from 1979.

5 Nawojka Cieślińska-Lokowicz, "Freiraum Kunst. Eine Einführung," in *Verteidigung der Moderne. Positionen der polnischen Kunst nach 1945*, ed., Sylvia Weber (Künselsau: Swiridoff, 2000), 16.

avant-garde. The collection was assembled in Poland and all over Europe, particularly in Paris, where two members of group a.r., Henryk Stażewski and Jan Brzekowski, were living and working at that time. Michel Seuphor, who was also responsible for the compilation of works, pointed out that it was the second place of a permanent exhibition of avant-garde art in Europe. During the German occupation of Poland, most of the collected works were denounced as degenerate art, but almost no work was destroyed or lost; the collection remained nearly untouched.

After World War II the museum was approved by the state in 1950. Its directors Marian Minich (1930–65) and Ryszard Stanisławski (1966–90) managed to make sure that the museum's Sztuki collection remained essentially an expression of international modernism and cultivated international collaborations. Donations made by several artists also contributed to the museum's collection. In 1975 Mateusz Grabowski entrusted 230 works by young British artists of the London Gallery to the museum. In 1981 Joseph Beuys set a milestone of transnational exchange with the *Polentransport*, when he transferred about 1,000 works of art to Łódz himself.

Likewise, artists such as Henryk Stażewski paved the way for a revitalization of geometric art in Poland (Plate 16.2). In Warsaw, where he owned a small art supplies store until 1949, he established an open space for art and artists through regular meetings. Soon he was surrounded by members of the younger generation of constructive-concrete working artists: Kajetan Sosnowski, Zbigniew Gostomski, Ryszard Winiarski and others. It can be said that Stażewski contributed to the formation of a new generation of concretists in Poland.

Later, Jürgen Blum-Kwiatkowski boosted the transnational exchange especially between Poland and Germany in the field of constructive-concrete art in the gallery EL, which was founded in the very north of Poland, far away from the artistic centers, in Elbląg. In the first year of the Biennale of Spatial Forms that was organized by the gallery from 1965 onward, forty artists from Poland and abroad responded to the invitation. The organization of annual symposia for artists who used the language of geometry in Okuninka from 1984 by Bożena Kowalska served as a platform of exchange, especially for artists from the GDR. The results of the symposia were exhibited in Chełm, where one of the works remained in the collection.

Due to all of this, the examination of prewar constructivism and the exchange of contemporary artistic developments were possible for the whole period in Poland. But this was a unique situation in the Eastern Bloc.

During the period 1945 to 1949, a new generation of artist joined with the Hungarian prewar avant-garde. Directly after the end of World War II, they founded the European School (Európai iskola) in order to reach as many people and artists as possible to spread the ideas of modernism and support a pluralism of styles. They organized exhibitions, published books and gave lectures, enjoying a good deal of success. But in 1948 the repression by the socialist system became so strong that the group split up and many artists left the country. Another turning point in Hungarian art was the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, which led to an exodus of artists.

It seems that not until 1968, when the first Iparterv exhibition started in an office for industrial planning in Budapest, did a broader public know that modernism and constructive-concrete art never ceased to exist in Hungary. Iparterv was a loosely connected group of young artists who did not follow the doctrine of socialist realism. They tried to associate themselves with Hungarian art history and with developments in Western Europe, so they did not focus on styles. They were engaged in various contemporary tendencies, from abstract painting to performance, mixing them or interchanging them in their own work.

But how did they know about developments on the other side of the Iron Curtain? Hungarian artists were able to leave the country in order to visit Western European countries, museums, and galleries as early as the 1960s. International art magazines were provided in libraries and in the artists' club Fészek, catalogs of Western European exhibitions circulated among the artists. But another essential opportunity for international exchange and the possibility to work was given to the artists from the Eastern Bloc, and especially to Hungarians, by the Museum Folkwang in Essen from 1970. Artists such as Imre Bak, István Nádler, László Lakner, or Dóra Maurer were supported by the museum's scholarship, which included the possibility to live and work in Essen-Verden for at least two months and to exhibit afterward at the Museum Folkwang.

Officials closed the first Iparterv exhibition after a few days. One reason might have been that no application had been submitted and there had been

no official approval of an exhibition, but it can be supposed that it was closed because it opposed the official cultural policy. But altogether the cultural policy of Hungary was much more liberal than in the GDR, so constructive-concrete working artists were allowed to exhibit nationally and internationally on a regular basis. For this reason, Hungary became a center of attraction for many artists from the Eastern Bloc.

In the first fifteen years the transnational artistic exchange in the field of constructive-concrete art was mainly based on the connections and contacts of the members of the avant-garde in Poland and Hungary. While it was possible in Poland to hold regular exhibitions and cooperate with artists from abroad, international relations seem to have been cut off at the beginning of the 1950s in Hungary as well as in Germany. Nevertheless, a younger generation of art historians and artists managed to network again. The exchange of exhibition catalogs or of graphic works of art, which could be sent by mail, was central to this. But it has to be pointed out that somehow the focus was more or less on exchanges with Western European countries. This might have been caused by the predominance of American influences on the constructive-concrete art from the late 1950s in the form of color-field painting, Hard-edge, minimal art and concept art. Nevertheless, there was an active exchange within the Eastern Bloc. Graphic art biennials and exhibitions of poster art or other fields of applied arts in which many constructive-concrete artists worked provided a chance for them to be in contact with each other in professional and trust-building contexts. However, this was a very generalized depiction. Differences do not only occur in regard to the cultural political situations of the countries, but also in regard to the generations of artists and each individual artist.

17

Nationalizing Modernism: Exhibitions of Hungarian and Czechoslovakian Avant-garde in Warsaw

Piotr Piotrowski

The late 1940s are probably one of the key periods in the history of European culture. I mean several years, not just 1945, since the Sovietization of culture in Central Europe was not a single event, but a long process that took several years and did not develop at the same speed in all the countries of the new Eastern Bloc. In Romania, decisions about culture were taken quite quickly, in contrast to Czechoslovakia, which kept its multiparty democratic system until the communist coup d'etat in February 1948; this was only the beginning of the Sovietization of culture, although, paradoxically, a very hard line in cultural policy was introduced more or less at the time of Stalin's death in March 1953. It should be added that the famous monument of the Leader, towering over the city of Prague, was built after his death. In Poland and Hungary, the process continued for much longer than in Romania and in different political frames of reference, even though communists seized uncontrolled power in both countries as early as 1945. Polish and Hungarian artists enjoyed a certain degree of freedom for some time and hoped—in vain, as soon became clear—not only that they would be able to keep their artistic liberties, but also, as is rarely remembered, that they would be allowed

to contribute to the new reality. Soviet domination and the new political regime were, of course, imposed on the countries of Central Europe violently, but on the other hand, the communists very skillfully relied on the leftist and critical tendencies, strong among the intelligentsia in the 1930s. Many artists and intellectuals, both in Hungary and in Poland, accepted the new political system as a genuine promise to create a utopia, and not until the 1940s did the socialist realism imposed everywhere as the one officially recognized convention allowed in the public sphere largely undermine that hope. After the fall of Stalinism, during the time of the Thaw initiated by Khrushchev's speech of early 1956, such hopes never reappeared in the artistic culture of the region. Besides, it should be remembered that in Czechoslovakia the Thaw came much later, and in Romania it came as late as the mid-1960s, while in Hungary, 1956 was the year of bloody atrocities after the Budapest Uprising. Only in Poland did the Thaw progress fairly rapidly in the late 1950s—more rapidly and deeply than in the USSR itself.

Regardless of the local differences, both before and after the imposition of socialist realism, modern art was a major point of reference all over Central Europe. The tradition of modern art, modernism, the avant-garde, etc. was understood in terms of different modes of representation and poetics, which historically often remained in conflict with one another, but stemmed from the same system of values whose foundation was internationalism, the international community, etc. The main conflict within modern art before World War II was that between autonomous and committed art, but both parties advocated an international artistic culture with its specific set of values. Outside modern art, its conflict with the conservative culture focused largely on nationalist values, next to, of course, the formal ones. It is important to keep in mind that modernism, to put it in the most general terms, was international. My line of reasoning in this article begins right at this point.

It should be remembered that the communist doctrine favored a similar system of values, at least on the literal, rhetorical level of its ideology. Matters became a little more complicated in practice when Stalin proclaimed "communism in one country," while Trotsky preferred a "global revolution," but in their rhetoric the communists never renounced their "internationalism." Regardless of the practice of "real socialism," writes Bo-

ris Groys, socialist realism was a utopia of the poststate and postnational culture.[1] Such an ideology was international almost by definition, and as such it overlapped with the theory of modern art. The problem is, however, that when we take a good look at the visual arts and the architecture of socialist realism, we find in them very few, if any, traces of modernity and the international style. On the contrary, various methods were used to contextualize that artistic doctrine, adjust to the local background, refer to national heritage, etc. A popular slogan—part of a definition of socialist realism—claimed that as art, it was "socialist in content and national in form." For modern artists, theorists, and critics, totally marginalized at that time, it was a double sin. Even though some avant-garde leftist groups adopted the socialist or, rather, communist utopia as a beacon for art, for many others it was unacceptable. The result was an interesting tension between the international rhetoric of communist ideology, and the national formula of communist art, to be seen primarily in the subject matter of paintings and architectural details. A more or less vigorous rejection of socialist realism in some Eastern Bloc countries after Stalin's death seemed to provide a chance for a return of thinking about art in international terms. It paved the way for a revival of the modernist and avant-garde tradition understood as a remedy for the official party realism of the propaganda art of the regime.

Still, my point in this article is a bit challenging. I want to demonstrate that because of the political context—the isolation of artists for political reasons (the rejection of Stalinism did not bring about a lifting of the Iron Curtain for culture and art)—the unofficial inter- or transnational art exchange resulted in the *nationalization* of modernism in the Eastern Bloc countries. In other words, I want to prove that although modern art was of international origin, the political situation and cultural policies of the communist regimes in particular countries—sometimes "harder," sometimes more "liberal," but always xenophobic and conditioned by changing political factors—the transnational (as I have said, most unofficial) exchange *nationalized* that art, making its specific versions national in character.

1 See in particular Boris Groys, *Art Power* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008)—chapters: "Beyond Diversity: Cultural Studies and Its Post-Communist Other," 149–63, "Privatization or Artificial Paradises of Post-Communism," 165–72. See also Boris Groys, "Back from the Future," in *2000+Art East Collection: The Art of Eastern Europe*, ed. Zdenka Badovinac and Peter Weibel (Wien-Bozen: Folio Verlag, 2001), 9–14.

Before I start discussing specific examples, which are supposed to illustrate my point, let me add one more general remark. In the West, too, modernism has been said to have its national versions, such as "French Informel," "American Pop art," or "Italian Arte Povera," yet all those terms are rooted in the artistic geography and related to the country of origin. However, thanks to unlimited artistic exchange, they spread all over the world and became more and more disconnected from their national background as stylistic labels. In comparison, not only did the East not enjoy freedom of travel and intellectual exchange, what is more, the artistic culture of the Eastern Bloc was quite atomized—paradoxically perhaps the artistic exchange with the West was relatively more lively than that among the countries of the East. While the authorities obviously favored official exchange, they did everything to thwart unofficial exchange, since it would mean artists enjoying some degree of independence, which meant they could slip out of control and, it was feared, destabilize the whole system. Consequently, the mediation among the Eastern Bloc countries continued indirectly via the West, though there were some significant exceptions. One of them was an attempt in 1972 by Jarosław Kozłowski (an artist) and Andrzej Kostołowski (an art critic) to organize a network of artistic exchange, called the NET, regardless of the artists' geographical provenance. In that—*nomen est omen*—"web," one could find members from Hungary, the US, Czechoslovakia, the UK, Germany and Poland. However, the first exhibition of the NET artists, organized in Kozłowski's private apartment, was confiscated by the police and he was subjected to an interrogation. Another event that should be mentioned in this context is an exhibition called *The Mirror* (1973), prepared by one of the most prominent art critics in Central Europe, László Beke. Beke was also harassed, while the venue, a former chapel of a church in Balatonboglár, Hungary, was immediately closed down, even though before that it had functioned fairly well as a very elitist gallery of Hungarian artists. This shows how afraid the authorities were of any international initiatives, particularly those establishing exchange among artists from the East.

Still, there is also the other aspect of the same issue, namely a kind of resistance of Eastern European artists against being qualified as "eastern." A book by Klaus Groh, *Aktuelle Kunst in Osteuropa*,[2] published in 1972, was, on the

2 Klaus Groh, *Aktuelle Kunst in Osteuropa: CSSR, Jugoslawien, Polen, Rumänien, USSR, Ungarn* (Cologne: Verlag M. DuMont Schauberg, 1972).

one hand, enthusiastically welcomed, since it legitimized the work of many artists from the Eastern Bloc countries in the West, but on the other hand, it provoked some reservations, as artists from the East did not want to be put in a sort of ghetto. They pictured themselves among their colleagues from the West, associated with the global art scene free of any geographical and political divisions, rather than among other artists from the East, since the Eastern scene was considered to be generated artificially by politics.

To return to the main point of my paper—that is, a belief that the exhibitions of the Eastern European modernists, organized in some neighboring country, acquired a national identity—I want to make a reference to two shows: first, the *Argumenty*, organized by the Warsaw independent art gallery Krzywe Koło in 1962, which, next to those of the Polish artists, included also works by a number of top artists from Czechoslovakia, associated with the local Informel, such as Jiři Balcar, Vladimir Boudnik, Josef Istler, Jan Koblasa, Mikulaš Medek, Robert Piesen, and Aleš Veselý; and second, a 1972 exhibition of the most outstanding artists of the Hungarian avant-garde, associated with the local conceptualism, organized in the Warsaw Foksal Gallery, which showed the works of Tamás Szentjóby, Miklós Erdély, György Jovánovics, Endre Tót, László Lakner, and Gyula Pauer. My choice of the Polish exhibitions has been dictated by the fact that because of the relatively more liberal policy of the Polish authorities, they could actually take place. Moreover, since organizing such shows was hardly possible in the home countries of those artists, one may say that their exhibitions in Poland were the first presentations of the Czechoslovak Informel and Hungarian conceptualism as integrated trends, which does not mean, of course, that individual artists from the two groups did not display their works at home. Paradoxically, their collective shows were organized abroad.

Let me begin with the former case. Even though the authorities did a lot to make independent international contacts between Polish and Czechoslovak artists difficult, they did not work in total isolation from one another. Poles, Czechs and Slovaks met on the occasion of the *Argumenty* exhibition arranged in 1962 in Warsaw by the Krzywe Koło Gallery. In a sense, it was a summit meeting of the artists of the modernist Thaw of both countries, organized—as must be stressed here—by the artists and art critics themselves.[3]

3 Janusz Zagrodzki, ed. *Galeria "Krzywe Koło." Katalog wystawy retrospektywnej* (Warsaw: Muzeum Narodowe, 1990), 107.

In fact, it was one of the first episodes in a whole series of joint exhibitions of artists from the neighboring countries (arranged mostly in Poland), which remained independent and went beyond the limits set by the official cultural policies. Such meetings were organized in a very specific, genuinely *partisan* way. According to Mahulena Nešlehová, František Šmejkal, curator of the Czechoslovak part of the exhibition, brought the paintings to Warsaw "illegally,"[4] which probably means that he did it without all the necessary permits, far from the eyes of the customs control. The idea of the joint show came from Marian Bogusz, director of the Krzywe Koło Gallery, who would go to Prague quite often, after he had met the Prague artists for the first time in 1945, on his way home from the Nazi concentration camp in Mauthausen. What is really paradoxical, though, is not the fact that the works of art were smuggled into Poland, but that the *Argumenty* show provided the first occasion to define the specific identity of the Czech Informel by Šmejkal,[5] whose efforts, highly appreciated by Nešlehová, the most outstanding expert in the field, have been relevant until today. Šmejkal actually began his essay with a remark that the exhibition had been organized to recognize the characteristics of the national schools in abstract painting. What was characteristic of the Czech art of that time was the heritage of surrealism, continuing until the early 1950s, with a rich repertoire of its fantasies, imaginings, and symbols. On the other hand, the isolation of Czech culture from the global artistic trends as a result of the political developments in the late 1940s contributed to the specific local conditions: the Czech Informel did not come into being, like the Polish one, as a result of contacts with the West, but stemmed from the vernacular tradition of surrealism. Šmejkal does not address the question whether the Polish influence, through Marian Bogusz and the Krzywe Koło Gallery, played any role at all, but it must be remembered that at that time Poland was no doubt a kind of gate to modernity, that is, to the West. It was easy for the Czech artists to reach for Polish art journals, such as *Przegląd Artystyczny* and then *Projekt*, not so much because of the similarity of the language, but simply because they could find them in the Czech libraries as publica-

4 Mahulena Nešlehová, *Poselstvi jiného výrazu. Pojeti "informelu" v českém uměni 50. a prvni poloviny 60. let* (Praha: Base/ARTetFACT, 1997), 239.

5 František Šmejkal, "Argunenty," in Mahulena Nešlehová, *Poselstvi jiného výrazu. Pojeti "informelu" v českém uměni 50. a prvni poloviny 60. let* (Praha: Base/ARTetFACT, 1997), 233–40.

tions coming from a brotherly socialist country. In fact, they became an important source of information,[6] next to mutual visits, which allowed artists to broaden their knowledge and exchange experience. What is significant for me, however, is not who knew what about the art of the neighbors, but what was the significance of the border barriers and how they were reflected in the perception and status of art. In this example of a kind of confrontation of Polish and Czechoslovak art, we can see how the *international* origin of modern art was nationalized, and—perhaps in the first place—how a *transnational* exhibition was used to define the *national* character of modern art. In other words, transnational art exchange, with a comparative bias, contributed in a back to front way to the recognition of a national character of that art.

The exhibition of the Hungarian conceptual artists in the Warsaw Foksal Gallery ten years later, in 1972, took place under different circumstances and had a slightly different character. It was not a joint exhibition of Polish and Hungarian art, but a show of the latter one. Indeed, the Foksal Gallery did not specialize in organizing "national presentations" of modern art, but showed the works of international artists regardless of their origin; both from the East and the West, from Europe as well as other continents. In that specific case, however, the idea was to present a group of artists from Budapest that was coherent in terms of their social contacts and pursuits, not very big but fairly active. The artists of the Hungarian neo-avant-garde had had their joint presentations before in Budapest, though always as a specific element of some larger context. Still, their exhibitions took place under hardly comfortable conditions, mostly in a partisan atmosphere, very different from whatever was going on at the same time in Poland. I remember that when I visited Budapest for the first time to take a look at contemporary Hungarian art, more or less in that period, I was surprised to discover that there were no independent galleries in town. Such conditions favored the integration of local artists and were one of the reasons why they had their exhibition in Warsaw. That, however, was not the first exhibition of the Hungarian neo-avant-garde in Poland—the first one was organized by János Brendel, émigré and a sort of ambassador of Hungarian culture, my long-time colleague in the Department of Art History of the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. He did

6 Nešlehová, *Poselstvi jiného výrazu*, 55, 241–42.

this in 1970 in Poznań, in an official art gallery *par excellence*, and that was no doubt the first show of that group of artists abroad.[7] The Warsaw exhibition that opened two years later was, however, much more coherent in terms of a specific artistic doctrine; much more closely related to the paradigm of the conceptual art than to some general idea of the avant-garde. What is more, just like in the case of the *Argumenty* show and the Czechoslovak Informel, the Hungarians were the top artists of their kind—a strong and well-defined representation of art of a given country. Besides, to take into consideration the status of the art on display, both shows nationalized the international traditions of modernism: either modernism, as in the case of the Informel, or the neo-avant-garde, as in the case of conceptual art. Yet the latter, the Hungarian exhibition, was not a comparative confrontation. Contrary to the *Argumenty*, its structure did not foreground a transnational relation, which, paradoxically again, might have augmented its "national" character.

The problem of the nationalization of modern art of an international origin and in fact international character in the countries ruled by the communists came to the surface even more distinctly whenever artists of particular countries had their shows organized in the West. Such exhibitions were quite numerous and most of them took place under the banner of "contemporary art from this or that country," which meant that their Western reception contributed to the *nationalization* of those historical-artistic processes as well. To illustrate the phenomenon, I will point to the activity of Richard Demarco from Edinburgh, who actually did a lot to popularize Central European modern art in the world, that is, in the West. Perhaps unwillingly, Demarco also favored the national approach, and the artists from behind the Iron Curtain often participated in the annual festivals which he organized. To avoid boring you with a list of examples and so as to concentrate on the processes, I will mention only one of Demarco's exhibitions, *Romanian Art Today* (1971).[8] The works of the avant-garde artists who took part in the event, including Horia Bernea, Ion Bitzan, Alexandru Cicurencu, Ion Alin Gheorghiu, Octav Grigorescu, Viorel Marginean, Serban Epure, Pavel Llie, Ovidiu Maitec, Paul Neagu, Ion Pacea, Diet Sayler, Vladimir Setran, Radu Stoica, Radu Dragomirescu, the Signal Group, Theodora Moisescu Stendl, and

7 See János Brendel, ed. *Wystawa grupy artystów węgierskich* (Poznań: BWA, 1970).
8 See *Romanian Art Today* (Edinburgh: Richard Demarco Gallery, 1971).

Ion Stendl, literally had very little to do with the context, that is, Romania of the early 1970s. Even though it was a very interesting moment in the history of Romanian art, related to several years of comparative liberty and distinct signs of change in Romanian cultural policy, the local artists of the period did not (contrary to the Hungarians) make any attempts at the explicit criticism of the regime and situated (or wished to situate) their art in a much wider frame of reference. The exhibition was extremely heterogeneous, and it would be difficult to draw from it any coherent conclusions as regards any common artistic ideas, which was the case for both Warsaw shows. In his brief foreword to the catalog, Richard Demarco did not even try to do so. Another critic, Anna Christina Anastasiu-Condiescu, sought in it a fairly enigmatic essentialization of Romanian culture and its alleged preference for the absurd, rather than any specific artistic activity. The longest text included in the catalog—and the most penetrating attempt to characterize the artists whose works were shown in Edinburgh—was written by Cordelia Oliver,[9] yet even there one can find strongly essentialist statements. In short, the Romanian origin was the only common characteristic of all the artists who took part in the exhibition. What is more, not all of them came from contemporary Romania, with its political problems, social tensions, and artistic variety, but from Romania in the strictly geographical sense of the word. Neither Demarco nor Oliver saw any problem in that, or they did not want to write about it, which would imply that the Romanian censors had very long hands, reaching all the way to the Edinburgh festival. Thus, instead of any analysis of art and the historical context of the rise of the Romanian neo-avant-garde, the critics tried to find in the works of contemporary Romanian artists some kind of national essence, attempting to nationalize contemporary Romanian art. I do not believe that the artists whose works were displayed at the Demarco Gallery were very happy about that, agreeing to an obvious consequence of the exhibition: assigning their art to the country of their origin or, more precisely, to the abstract essence of the latter. Still, they wanted to show their works in the West, since that gave them a chance to break out of the national ghetto, and there were not too many offers available. The nationalization of the avant-garde was the price of its appearance in the West.

9 *Romanian Art Today*, no pagination.

There is no doubt that the year 1989 changed a lot, not only in Eastern Europe. I think that the transformations in our part of the continent and the fall of the authoritarian regimes in South America and South Africa have contributed to what I would call the rise of post-totalitarian or post-authoritarian studies, very different from the popular and booming post-colonial ones. In other words, it is an attempt to deal with something more general than the postcommunist condition—a condition that could provisionally be called postauthoritarian. Moreover, and this may be a crucial problem, the year 1989 very deeply remodeled the perception of the world, from binary, operating with clear-cut oppositions, to pluralistic and multidimensional. What seems to me important now is how much the model of the artistic international and transnational exchange has changed so far. Apparently, in our part of Europe the process of the nationalization of modern and postmodern art has come to an end, and a new situation has created frames for very different processes in that respect.

In general, there is no doubt that since 1989, in reflections on contemporary artistic culture, categories such as "Eastern Europe," the "Eastern Bloc," or even the politically more neutral "Central Europe" have been dropped. In other words, the eastern part of the continent has been deregionalized and geography has become much less important. In fact, apart from the problematic of history, present artistic initiatives seem to be shifting emphasis from geography (thinking in terms of countries and regions) to topography (thinking in terms of places). Now, we are more likely to speak about cities (Bratislava, Budapest, Bucharest, Prague, Warsaw, and Vilnius) than about Central or Eastern Europe. Particularly the latter term is strongly determined by history and politics. This does not mean, however, that there are no projects based on regionalism. Next to not very successful political initiatives (such as the Visegrád Group), as regards culture, such attempts have been made in the Balkans, where local artistic identity is growing dynamically thanks to joint artistic and editorial events, including among the Baltic states, where joint efforts are perhaps more modest and definitely less spectacular. Against the background of these two regional constructions, particularly the Balkans, Central Europe (understood in traditional terms) keeps a very low profile, owing more to its local metropolitan centers than to any regional initiatives. The artistic legitimation of the iden-

tity of postcommunist Central Europe must be specified not in geographical, but in topographic terms; once again, it is a shift of emphasis from *geography* to *topography*.

As a result of the shift of emphasis from geography to topography, the idea of the "transnational," so useful for research on the artistic culture of the recent past, has been losing its relevance as well. At first glance, one might say that in this case the term "international" is more operative, which would mean a return to the idiom of modernism. After all, it was modernism that turned it into an object cult, a sort of fetish of a new culture. Without making precise distinctions, one may, of course, argue, in a casual manner, that cultural exchange seen in a topographic perspective is more international than transnational; however, such a claim is perhaps rather superficial. In fact, the name of the game is different now: it is cosmopolitanism. I understand this term in the original Greek sense as a combination of the city (*polis*) and the world (*cosmos*): *cosmo-polis*, a world city, a city-world, city-universe, one whose citizens are citizens of the world, for whom the proper space of the debate is both the municipal agora, and—let us say—the space of the whole planet. A new culture, emerging from the general processes of globalization, is then literally cosmopolitan. The relations among particular cities or metropolitan centers should perhaps be called transcosmopolitan. Consequently, if the artistic geography, which was a comparative method of analyzing art of the communist era, implied transnational relations, in fact resulting in the nationalization of modernism and the neo-avant-garde, the artistic topography, a method of analyzing the culture of the postcommunist (though not only) era, approached as part of the global structure of artistic exchange, implies the concept of transcosmopolitanism.

In other words, since 1989, in (former) Eastern Europe cities have become more important than countries. Certainly, the former have always had their identity, which did not necessarily overlap with the national one. Still, in the communist era, cities—particularly capitals, but sometimes also other "provincial centers," such as Brno in Czechoslovakia, Zagreb in Yugoslavia, Leipzig in the GDR, Łódź, Cracow and Wrocław in Poland, Leningrad in the USSR, and Cluj and Timişoara in Romania, functioned, as it were, as the *partes pro toto* of the national identity. Now, it appears that along a general tendency toward the metropolization of culture on a global scale, the

big cities of (former) Eastern Europe have become much more unique and autonomous, as well as independent of national identities. This trend has also been acknowledged by today's artistic discourse, for instance, in *Leap into the City*, a book edited by Katrin Klingan and Ines Kappert, consisting of chapters focusing on particular postcommunist cities, not always metropolitan centers in a global sense, such as Ljubljana, Priština, Sarayevo, Sofia, Warsaw, and Zagreb. What seems especially important in this book is that the cities have been approached in a number of different perspectives. It does not propose any uniform method of description or attempt to grasp their uniqueness in the same way. Instead, it is an approach through certain fragments, discussions and partial analyses, far from essentializing generalizations. It is a genuine achievement of the volume's authors and editors, since in this way the city can be saved from nationalization to reveal its heterogeneous character.[10]

Most certainly, a very special city-place (*cosmo-polis*), quite difficult to compare with the others mentioned so far, but still, I believe, important for the debate about (former) Eastern Europe, is Berlin. We tend to take for granted the fact that East Berlin, the capital of the GDR, has been incorporated by the Federal Republic and the Western part of the present capital. It may be worthwhile to address the question whether this genuine metropolis has any significance in a discussion about the cosmopolitan character of this part of Europe. In other words, we should perhaps find the Eastern European traces in today's capital of Germany. One such trace is an exhibition called *Riss im Raum*, organized by Matthias Flügge, showing the post-1945 art of the Czech Republic, both parts of Germany, Poland, and Slovakia. Another is *Exchange and Transformation: Central-European Avant-Gardes*, a show brought to Berlin from Los Angeles, focusing on the classic Central-European avant-garde or, more precisely, the classic avant-gardes of that part of the continent. Perhaps there are more. In this respect, one should also ask whether such interests actually challenge the transnational model in favor of the transcosmopolitan one. There are many examples that corroborate this intuitive claim, provided, among others, by the activity of the Künstlerhaus Bethanien, run by

10 See Katrin Klingan and Ines Kappert, eds., *Leap into the City* (Cologne: Verlag M. DuMont Literatur und Kunst Verlag, 2006).

Christoph Tannert. References to Eastern Europe are often to be found in the wide-ranging, international program of that institution.

However, the case of Berlin is surely not a typical illustration of the cosmopolization of the former Eastern Bloc. The cities mentioned in the book edited by Klingan and Kappert provide better examples of that process. They are definitely much smaller than the capital of the reunited Germany, and the local processes going on there are narrower in scope than those observable in Berlin. One of those processes is the development of art institutions of a European (and sometimes even more general) significance, such as the Centre for Contemporary Art Ujazdowski Castle in Warsaw, most likely the largest and the most active public institution of its kind in postcommunist Europe (except for Berlin), and the private DOXa in Prague. Both of them organize big exhibitions of a cosmopolitan character. Another important factor that contributes to growing cosmopolitanism is migration, in particular that of artists. It happens more and more often (and this has been the case in the West for a long time) that artists choose as their place of residence the city or country where they were born or educated. Communist Europe did not know this phenomenon, or rather it experienced it on a minor scale. The movement was largely one-way: Eastern European artists, intellectuals, managers of culture, dealers and curators emigrated to Western Europe or the United States never to return. Now, since 1989, not only have many of them come back, but they have also started moving from one Eastern European city to another. What is more, some (so far few) Western artists have moved to the East, and there will perhaps be more and more who do just that.

Still, what makes the metropolitan centers cosmopolitan in the first place are biennial exhibitions, the number of which all over the world is now allegedly 146.[11] They are organized in Australia, China (both on the mainland and Taiwan) and (most of them) in Europe, very often by curators of international renown. Moreover, the artists who take part in them often come from the highest level of global artistic culture. Frequently, such shows are generously financed by both the private and public sectors—local authorities want to publicize the attractions of their regions. For the local audiences, the

11 Irit Rogoff, "Geo-Cultures, Circuits of Arts and Globalizations," *Open: Cahier on Art and the Public Domain* 8:16 (2009): 114.

biennials provide opportunities to become familiar with current trends in art, while on the other hand, they turn into cultural tourist traps and attract the international public and the media. Some of them are very open, others concentrate on particular regions or problematics. The biennial exhibitions are also organized in (former) Eastern Europe: in Bucharest, Iaşi, Prague (two competing events: one organized by *Flesh Art*—Giancarlo Politi and Helena Kontova, the other by the National Gallery—Milan Knížák) and in Poznań, Poland (called *Mediations*). The *Mediations* biennial is actually unique, since it has a double frame of reference: global and regional, Eastern European. It developed in the context of an earlier exhibition, *Asia-Europe Mediation*, prepared by Tomasz Wendland, presently the biennial's director, responsible for mediating between the two continents. This idea has been continued by the biennial. At first, the most important was the Asian aspect, but quickly its scope became global. Interestingly, Eastern Europe has become the focus of the global perspective as a space of mediation between various cultures. In 2008, the Poznań show arranged by three curators (Lóránd Hegyi, Gu Zhenqing, and Yu Yean Kim) attracted more than 200 artists from all over the world and almost every continent. At the same time, the main emphasis was on the Eastern European placement of the "mediations"—not so much by the selection of artists from that part of Europe (although this was important as well), but above all by creating in the essays included in the catalog their discursive context and interpretive frame.[12] Of course, the most famous biennial in (former) Eastern Europe are the ones in Moscow and Berlin. One of the latter—the fifth, whose curators were Adam Szymczyk and Elena Filipović—was turned toward the former East.

The passing from the artistic geography, in which the subjects were specific countries and their transnational relations, to topography, favoring cities, is a very interesting feature of contemporary culture. Hence, one can assume that the relations among the cities will soon cease to be transnational to become transcosmopolitan. The biennials and their analysis is a good starting point for thinking in such terms, particularly that, according to Boris Groys, they are not only tourist attractions and opportunities for the promotion of the international, global capital, but also, and perhaps in the first place, oc-

12 See Tomasz Wendland, ed., *Mediations Biennale* (Poznań: Centrum Kultury "Zamek," 2008).

casions to develop a global political forum, global *politeia*.[13] Adopting such a point of view, one can say that the cosmopolitan cities, including also those in (former) Eastern Europe, and their cosmopolitan cultural activity, such as biennials, will create a network of cosmopolitan intellectual exchange and transcosmopolitan relations of which the topography of (former) Eastern Europe will be a part.

13 Boris Groys, "From Medium to Message. The Art Exhibition as a Model of a New World Order," *Open: Cahier on Art and the Public Domain* 8:16 (2009): 64–65.

18

Avant-garde Construction: Leonhard Lapin and His Concept of Objective Art

Mari Laanemets

The following article will look at the change taking place in artistic practice during the 1970s in Estonia—at that time a republic in the USSR—and more precisely, how this was theorized by Leonhard Lapin, an ambitious leader of the Estonian artistic avant-garde. Since the Khrushchev reforms in the late 1950s, adaptation to the trends of Western contemporary art became a kind of touchstone for unofficial art in opposition to official cultural policies and the doctrine of socialist realism, and evidence of being avant-garde.[1] The decade of the 1970s, following the disillusionment after the suppression of mass demonstrations in Prague in spring 1968, has been described as reactionary. Indeed, direct Western influences disappeared—there is no apparent evidence of adaptation of conceptual art or minimal art as there is of abstract art or Pop art in the 1960s. Instead, the artists, among them Lapin, were invoking the heritage of the avant-garde from the beginning of the century. In general accounts, this change has thus been interpreted as the aban-

1 Sirje Helme, "Why Do We Call It Avant-Garde? Abstract Art and Pop Art in Estonia in the Late 1950s and in the 1960s," in *Different Modernisms, Different Avant-Gardes: Problems in Central and Eastern European Art after World War II*, ed. S. Helme (Tallinn: Eesti Kunstimuuseum, 2009), 138–52.

donment of progressive ideas and a retreat to cosmic and metaphysical dimensions.

However, in 1975 Lapin gave a speech at a seminar held on the occasion of a noninstitutional exhibition where he demanded from his colleagues that they engage with the new industrial environment and social reality. The two distinct characteristics of that new art were its interdisciplinarity and internationality.

The text of the speech entitled "Objective Art" was distributed in a hectographed booklet called *Let a Man Be* (compiled by the artist Raul Meel). Although it was not officially published until 1995, it is one of the most important programmatic texts formulating the (new) art practice emerging in the late 1960s.[2] In this contribution I will endeavor to unfold the context and to trace the international network[3] at play in Lapin's speech and in his concept of objective art. I will then rethink the aforementioned break that took place in Estonian art in the mid-1970s as a constructive turn. I will theorize interdisciplinarity not as a malformation,[4] but as a specific feature of the new art that departed from the field of art in favor of design and architecture.

In the context of restricted cultural politics, travel even to the countries of the Warsaw Pact was possible only for a small group of citizens. The vouchers that enabled one to travel abroad, as well as attend exhibitions, use studios, and have access to cars, were distributed by the board of the Artists' Union. All foreign contacts were established through Moscow (the USSR Ministry of Culture and the USSR Artists' Union) and cultural exchange was carried out on the basis of official permission.[5] In the shadow of official exchange programs, unofficial friendships blossomed. However, these personal contacts with primarily Finnish and Russian artists[6] rarely devel-

2 Leonhard Lapin, "Objektiivne kunst," in *Harku 1975–1995*, ed. L. Lapin, A. Liivak, and R. Meel (Tallinn: Tallinna Kunstihoone, 1995), 23–29.

3 Here, of course, the virtual network constructed through magazines and books is meant.

4 The dominant approach to the history of Soviet-period art designates these kinds of local developments of art, which differ from the ongoing mainstream discourse on Western art, stressing autonomy and purity as mutation.

5 For a detailed description of the art life in the Estonian SSR see: Anu Liivak, "Official 70s," in *Harku 1975–1995*, ed. L. Lapin, A. Liivak, and R. Meel (Tallinn: Tallinna Kunstihoone, 1995), 55–57.

6 The founder of the Moscow–Estonian art axis was the Estonian artist Ülo Sooster, who after his release from the Karaganda prison camp had moved to Moscow where he for years shared a studio with Ilya Kabakov. Sooster's studio on Sretenie Boulevard became the place of pilgrimage for many Estonian artists, but Sooster frequently visited Estonia and introduced his Russian friends to local artists. Yet Lapin's first visit to Moscow happened after Sooster's death in 1970.

oped from mutual studio visits[7] into collaborative exhibitions or immediate cooperation.[8]

The plea for internationality seems rather dubious in a situation where the only possibility to participate in international art life was the printmaking biennials, where works could be sent by post,[9] or using foreign tourists as couriers.[10] Nevertheless, I want to argue that the claim of Lapin is to be taken seriously and that it was not just a phrase, a mimicry, involving history to find justification for contemporary art practice while working within a repressive political system.[11] I will show that it advocated the transformation and redefinition of the art object, leading to a repoliticization of art—even though most of the artists would not consider themselves as political artists. However, in 1970 Lapin declared that "picture-making" had become for the new public of the 1970s an incomprehensible Bohemianism and there was a "latent social need" for a "new kind of relationship to art."[12]

On 6 December 1975, the noninstitutional exhibition *Event—Harku '75: Objects, Concepts* opened at the Institute for Experimental Biology in Harku near Tallinn. It was later to become known as the last unofficial show and the end of the avant-garde in Estonia.[13] The exhibition itself, like all unoffi-

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7 For example, the home of the artists Tõnis and Mare Vint was one well-known meeting place for artists in the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s and was frequently visited by Lapin, as well as by Moscow artists Yuri Sobolev and Vyatcheslav Koleichuk. See also: Andres Kurg, "Empty White Space: Home as a Total Work of Art during the Late-Soviet Period," *Interiors: Design, Architecture and Culture* 2:1 (2011): 45–68.

8 Yuri Sobolev recounts two exhibitions of Moscow unofficial artists in Estonia: one in 1967 in the House of the Blackheads during an international jazz festival and featuring the works of Yankilevski, Sooster, and Kabakov, and another in 1984 in the Tartu Museum of Art under the guise of a display of photography in the visual arts. Yuri Sobolev, "Virtual Estonia and No Less Virtual Moscow," in *Tallinn–Moscow, 1956–1985*, ed. L. Lapin and A. Liivak (Tallinn: Tallinna Kunstihoone, 1996), 42–47.

9 Posting works of art abroad was forbidden only in the middle of the 1970s. In 1966, for the first and last time, a group of Estonian artists visited the Krakow Biennial; Jüri Hain, "Üks kollektiivne kogemus kuuekümnendatest," *Kunst* 71:1 (1988): 28–30.

10 The ferry between Tallinn and Helsinki and the completion of the Inturist Viru Hotel in 1972 brought Finnish tourists to Tallinn. The architect Tiit Kaljundi has recounted how he submitted a project to a competition of the Japan Architects' Association (1975) by looking for reliable-looking Finnish tourists from the vicinity of Hotel Viru. In exchange for the postage and possible trouble, Kaljundi gave his shaman masks from Mongolia. "The ABS's of the Tallinn School," in *Environment, Projects, Concepts: Architects of the Tallinn School, 1972–1985*, ed. A. Kurg and M. Laanemets (Tallinn: Eesti Arhitektuurimuuseum, 2008), 272.

11 Sirje Helme, "In the Beginning There Was No Word!," in *Kaks kunsti. Valimik ettekandeid ja artikleid kunstist ning ehituskunstist 1971–1995*, ed. L. Lapin (Tallinn: Kunst, 1997), 194.

12 Leonhard Lapin, "Häppening Eestimaal (1970)," in *Artikleid ja ettekandeid kunstist 1967–1977* (manuscript collection, Tallinn, 1977), 14. (Manuscript in Leonhard Lapin's archive.)

13 S. Helme and J. Kangilaski, *Lühike eesti kunsti ajalugu* (Tallinn: Kunst, 1999), 192.

cial shows, was miscellaneous, even eclectic, collection of works representing such diverse trends as Pop Art (which had been the most significant tendency in Estonian alternative art since the late 1960s), kinetic objects, concrete poetry, and geometric abstraction. At the opening of the show, the first Estonian progressive rock band Mess performed.

The main subject of the seminar, held on the occasion of the exhibition,[14] was conceptualism as the most topical tendency in art,[15] although, more generally, the issues of the role and function of art and artist in the society were raised and discussed.[16]

In his speech, Leonhard Lapin launched the notion of objective art as the future of art practice. Lapin called for a universal language of art, for forms that are based on and developed in accordance with the contemporary industrial reality and technological progress (Plate 18.1). It is indeed the new reality itself that calls upon artists to reconsider their practice. For Lapin, the changes in the environment (industrialization) and the development of technology, introducing completely new production environments and means of production and communication, had fundamentally changed the concept of art. The current crises in art, which Lapin mentions in his speech, have to do with ignorance about these changes and their implications for art and the role of the artist.

The most important goal of this new objective art was the design of new urban surroundings, the creation of an integral aesthetic environment. Therefore, it could not exist as an artifact, as an object, but had to become an "inherent part of the environment."[17] This art was to overcome the boundaries between different disciplines, such as painting, sculpture, or architecture. It encompassed a variety of techniques, most notably multimedia and electronics. Thus, objective art was not a new style or aesthetic—it was the ideology of a new culture. Objective art does not express the "subjective view of the artist,

14 The exhibition was initiated by the artists Sirje Runge, Leonhard Lapin, Raul Meel, and the physicist Tõnu Karu, and organized by the House of Scientists Section of Junior Researchers. Scientific institutions often offered 'space' for alternative art exhibitions outside the institutional system. However, beginning in the mid-1960s, artists became more interested in the nexus between art and science, in the development of new technologies and the possibilities they opened for art. On the level of student organizations, the meetings of young artists, authors, scientists, etc. in summer camps were widespread and popular.

15 Martti Preem, "Sündmus Harkus," in *Harku 1975–1995*, ed. L. Lapin, A. Liivak, and R. Meel (Tallinn: Tallinna Kunstihoone, 1995), 46.

16 The presentations are reprinted in *Harku 1975–1995*, ed. L. Lapin, A. Liivak, and R. Meel (Tallinn: Tallinna Kunstihoone, 1995).

17 Lapin "Objektiivne," 23.

his arbitrary fun by playing with the forms taken from reality," Lapin wrote (he obviously had Pop art, and maybe even hyperrealism in mind), but "turns to universal ideas, objective structures and materials."[18] An objective artist, he continued, "does not express, but constructs; his or her creative process is not so much emotional and spontaneous, inasmuch intellectual."[19]

Lapin's concept of objective art is a mixture of ideas; it contains references to different sources, combining various, even divergent, ideas from different historical periods of art. This kind of patchwork is not unusual in a situation where only fragmented information was available, magazines and books that one got hold of by chance, or some even more rare encounters with foreign art. (I am writing about a generation of artists who had entered art school in the late 1960s and so had no experience of the international exhibitions and festivals that resulted from the Thaw.)

Objectivity and the depersonalization of the creation process had been the catchword of the neo-avant-garde in the West, and in particular of conceptualism. The predefined concept determined the form of the work, liberating it from the authoritative subjectivity of the artist. The demand that the artist must get rid of their personal emotions and abandon the ambition of singularity, might thus refer to conceptualism. Lapin indeed mentioned conceptualism as the most radical current of "objective art," as art of pure ideas.[20] This will lead to a situation, he wrote, where art that does not need special means and social acceptance can be made by anyone. "Everyone is an artist . . . releasing a chain of spontaneous performances, an avalanche of irrational acts, destroying the myth of art as a product of special human activity."[21]

As suggested at the beginning, the thesis of objective art cannot be explained only through models relying on the practices of the Western neo-avant-garde. Except the passing mention of conceptualism as the last stage of objective art, there are no other direct references to contemporary Western practitioners (while Lapin introduces prewar tendencies from Cézanne to the futurists as the origins of objective art). We have to look more carefully at the local context and the discussions from which it emerges.

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18 Ibid., 23.
19 Ibid., 23.
20 Lapin, "Objektiivne," 23.
21 Ibid., 28. Obviously Lapin is alluding to Joseph Beuys's sentence, without mentioning Beuys in his text.

Lapin was trained as an architect, and his friends Andres Tolts and Ando Keskküla as well as his then wife Sirje Runge were graduates in industrial art from one of the most progressive departments at the State Art Institute at that time (Plate 18.2).[22] The initiator and head of department, Bruno Tomberg, whose program combined the universalist ideas of the Bauhaus with contemporary design discourses about socially responsible design, insisted on the synthetic nature of design. "Design is a phenomenon of the synthesis of material culture," wrote Tomberg in 1979, "the social, ideological, cultural and other influences have always been integrated into art."[23] In addition to a traditional art syllabus, the program included information theory, bionics, and sociology. The investigation of everyday life and environments formed part of the work of the designers with the self-image as socially responsible and transformative practitioners. The goal of design was nothing less than the reform of life of which the designer-artist was an agent. Lapin's understanding of art's role, seeing art as organizing the environment in its totality rather than adding singular objects to it, originates from contemporary discussions in design.[24] And yet, it was different. Lapin's goal was neither a harmonious and functional environment, nor the control of chaos by means of total design. Instead, Lapin was interested in disrupting rationality and functionality of modern urban space, confronting it with irrational, illogical and even destructive elements as a means of intervening in the means-ends logic of modern technocratic society.

At the same time, Lapin's discussion of the future of contemporary art calling to environmentally encompassing work of art draws on Pierre Restany's book *Livre blanc—objet blanc* (1969).[25] Lapin quoted passages from Restany's book, where the latter delineated the changes of art and its institutions. Restany attempted to redefine the role of art in the new technological reality of the new entertainment society and encouraged artists to use the new technological means and media to create what he calls total art. He encouraged artists

22 The study of industrial art was introduced in 1966, and in 1968 it became a separate department.

23 B. Tomberg, *Jooni disaini arengust* (manuscript in Estonian Museum of Applied Art and Design, Tallinn, 1979), 5–6. Cited in Andres Kurg, "Feedback Environment: Rethinking Art and Design Practices in Tallinn during the Early 1970s," *Kunstiteaduslikke Uurimusi* 20:1–2 (2011): 30.

24 As Andres Kurg has shown recently, the information theories had an impact on concepts of design developed in the late 1960s, and these again were appropriated by alternative art practices. Kurg, "Feedback," 26–50.

25 The book was available for Lapin apparently through its Finnish translation from 1970. P. Restany, *Valkoinen kirja* (Porvoo: WSOY, 1970).

to overcome the distinctions between different fields of art and to experiment with psycho-sensuous perception, so that art could merge into reality, creating a new kind of environment.[26] The debate was not unknown to Estonian artists. In their manifesto, written in 1971, the Tartu-based artist group Visarid called for a new kind of art appropriate to "tomorrow's automated recreational society."[27] "The aim of the artist is no longer to seek refuge and to turn his back on the world, but to constantly enhance his participation in the facts of life. He leads people to better understand the essence of the new reality."[28] To be more successful, new art breaks down walls separating different branches of art, creating a synthesis of all the numerous plastic types of art. "In the future, individual artists will no longer create separate works of art, but groups of artists will reorganize the whole environment, designing not individual commodities, but the whole ambience for everyday activities."[29] The artist was to become the "irreplaceable interior designer" of the new society.

In particular, the proposal for art as a kind of public entertainer and guide to new experiences comes close to the ideas of Restany, who saw the function of art experiments among other things in their ability to aid people to develop their perceptual skills and thus to "live better, feel better, communicate our dreams better."[30] The manifesto states:

> Like in the synthesis of different types of art, . . . it no longer brings about a simple change of our environment, but a change in that environment's psychological and perceptional scope, as well as in people's capacity of observation and fantasy. The aim will be absolute art—art for everyone and every place.[31]

Obviously, Lapin was familiar with the manifesto of Visarid. The leader and founding member of the group, Kaljo Põllu, was the head of the art studio of Tartu State University and the organizer of various exhibitions and

26 Restany, *Valkoinen*, 33–34.
27 Kaljo Põllu and Anu Liivak, eds., *The Visarid Artists' Group, Tartu 1967–1972* (Tallinn: Tallinna Kunstihoone, 1997), 89.
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid.
30 Restany, *Valkoinen*, 57.
31 Põllu and Liivak, *The Visarid*, 89.

talks held in the university café. Lapin and Sirje Runge had an exhibition there in 1973. The studio was founded in 1957 with the purpose of providing future teachers with additional skills. One of its activities, initiated by Põllu, was the translation and publication of art literature. Reviews and articles from the Eastern European art magazines *Výtvarné Umění* from Czechoslovakia and *Projekt* from Poland, but also from *Art in America* and *Studio International*, were translated by students of languages and made available in copies of self-edited volumes called *Visarid*.[32]

In his speech, Lapin quoted Jindřich Chalupecký whose article about avant-garde in art had been translated and published in the third edition of *Visarid* in 1969.[33] Chalupecký's concern was similar to that of Lapin (and the Visarid group)—to rethink the role of art in the era that apparently does not need art. He was looking for ways for art to function in the new mass media reality that he, like Restany, interpreted as "modern nature," without turning it into just decoration or making it yield entirely.[34] The pathos of Chalupecký's article, however, was the crises of civilization and the fate of humankind, which he believed to be threatened with extinction. Indicating that art, impractical in itself, could inspire people to seek practical goals like the renewal of civilization, Chalupecký sought to prove the need for art. Art's critique of civilization was, according to Chalupecký, its most powerful defense.[35]

Lapin's position—that art should merge with the new reality and become part of the industrially manufactured environment by employing multimedia and electronics as the specific means of expression of the era—was informed by the texts of Restany and Chalupecký. For Lapin, too, the new "integral" culture could only be realized by accepting artificial nature as part of cosmic nature.[36] He also stressed the need for new kinds of institutions

32 From 1968 to 1971 altogether five issues were prepared in the art studio. In addition to that several books were translated: Vassily Kandinsky's *Stupeni* (1918), Michel Seuphor's *Abstract Art* (1964), Pierre Volboudt's *Kandinsky, 1922–1944* (1963), Herbert Read's *A Concise History of Modern Painting* (1964), Lothar Geriche and Klaus Schöne's *Das Phänomen Farbe. Zur Geschichte und Theorie ihrer Anwendung* (1970), etc. According to Põllu it was no problem to order printed matter from socialist states to Tartu University, but even Western catalogs were available in the ordering department of the university library. See: "Art Studio of University of Tartu and the 'Golden Sixties': Kaljo Põllu Tecalls," *Kunst.ee* 4 (2006), 60.

33 Jindřich Chalupecký, "Avangardismist kunstis," *Visarid* 3 (1969): 4–15. Translated from: Jindřich Chalupecký, "Art en 1967," *Výtvarné umění* 17:10 (1967).

34 Ibid., 14.

35 Ibid., 15.

36 Lapin, "Objektiivne," 25.

by ending his speech with the following vision: "In the future, the new objective art will step down on the street. Museums are going to be information and production centers and monuments, designed for eternity, they are going through many formal transformations."[37] His call for the reconstruction of the surrounding space at the same time goes hand-in-hand with constructivism.

In October 1975, two months before the opening of the exhibition in Harku, where Lapin was due to give his speech, he and his then wife Sirje Runge were traveling to Moscow. The reason for the trip was the Ninth ICSID (International Council of Societies of Industrial Design) Congress where the diploma work of Runge was presented.[38] The congress, with prominent international participants, such as Tomás Maldonado, was visited by a delegation of Estonian designers and artists.[39]

During the stay Lapin also visited the collection of Georgi Costakis—one of the biggest private avant-garde art collections during the Soviet era, displayed in Costakis's apartment—which made a strong impact on him.[40] In the same year, Lapin became acquainted with the Leningrad artist Pavel Kondratiev, a pupil of Malevich and Pavel Filonov, with whom they were good friends until Kondratiev's death in 1985.[41] And of course, two members of the Estonian constructivist group Eesti Kunstnikkude Ryhm (Group of Estonian artists) founded in 1923, Arnold Akberg and Märt Laarman, were still alive in the 1970s.

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37 Ibid., 29. The passage is a quote from Restany's book, which Lapin does not reference.

38 See: Lapin, "Objektiivne," 27–28. Although it is not entirely clear where the work was shown. The Russian artists Yuri Sobolev (who at the time was working for the magazine *Znanije Zhila*) and Yuri Reshetnikov compiled a multimedia program for the ICSID, working under the general title "Design for Man and Society," using the works of different artists and designers. Within the program the work of another Estonian artist, Raul Meel, was presented.

39 In his keynote speech "Design and the Future of Environment," Maldonado expressed thoughts similar to those uttered by Lapin: "Can his [the designer's] job be redefined within the context of today's appeal for a greater responsibility on the part of absolutely everyone towards human survival, at present under a serious threat?" Tomás Maldonado, "Design and the Future of Environment," in *Design and State Policy* (booklet of the congress, 1975), 1.

40 Lapin commented on it in a postcard to the art historian Eda Sepp: "We visited the Russian Constructivist private collection of Costakis. . . . Astonishing collection, marvelous experience. Altogether a different impression of Russian art from the 20s and 30s than literature has so far presented." Eda Sepp, "Leonhard Lapin: Autoportrait as Paradox and Parody," in *Leonhard Lapin. Maal, graafika, skulptuur, arhitektoon* (Tallinn: Eesti Kunstimuuseum, 1997), 21.

41 Leonhard Lapin, "Pavel Mihhailovitš Kondratjev 1902–1985," *Kunst* 68:1 (1986): 55. Lapin was introduced to Kondratiev by the Ukrainian artist Vladimir Makarenko, who had moved to Estonia.

When the program of the synthesis of art and architecture under the guidance of the newest technologies for creating new spaces was influenced by the theories of design and ideas of theorists like Restany, who encouraged artists to extend the artistic field, Lapin developed his constructive notion of art in dialogue with the Soviet avant-garde, in particular constructivism and suprematism.[42]

The idea that art rather than just acting as a diversion in the life of ordinary people, must instead be its organizer, was indebted to constructivism. Lapin extensively quoted the Estonian constructivist Märt Laarman, who edited and published *Uue kunsti raamat* (The book of new art), the manifesto of Estonian constructivists in 1928: "The mission of art is not to copy or imitate existing things, but to create new ones. . . . The artist confines his expression to a set of iron rules and by adopting them joins the collective."[43] Furthermore: "We are proud that we are building not on the foundation of what is distinct and singular in a person, what separates one person from another, but on the foundation of what people have in common. Thus, the new art is international."[44] Laarman also indicated the new role of art: "Art that entertained or diversified life is now in charge of organizing life."[45] Here Laarman in turn referred to El Lissitzky and Ilya Ehrenburg's preface to the first volume of the trilingual journal *Вещь/Objet/Gegenstand* (1922) and called for a "constructive art" that "is not intended to alienate people from life, but to summon, to contribute to organizing it."[46] In 1967, the East German publishing house Kunst issued a voluminous monograph, compiled by El Lissitzky's widow Sophie Lissitzky-Küppers, which included Lissitzky's paint-

42 In Lapin's understanding, constructivism succeeded in connecting suprematist (objective) imagery with new methods of production, it was a necessary utilization of suprematist ideas to create new objectivity. Lapin, "Objektiivne," 24. See also: L. Lapin, *Avangard* (Tartu: Tartu Ülikooli kirjastus, 2003), 69–83.

43 Lapin, "Objektiivne," 25.

44 Ibid., 25. This quotation is so far remarkable, as personal handwriting was very important in restoring artistic autonomy and signifying one's opposition toward the official establishment. On this see: Jaak Kangilaski, "Paradigma muutus 1970. aastate lääne kunstis ja selle kajastus Eesti kunstielus," in *Kunstist, Eestist ja Eesti kunstist* (Tartu: Ilmamaa, 2000), 220. Whereas intelligibility and collectivism were the official requirements for art, internationality was its ideology.

45 Lapin "Objektiivne," 25.

46 E. Lissitzky and I. Ehrenburg, "Die Blockade Rußlands geht ihrem Ende entgegen," in *El Lissitzky. Maler, Architekt, Typograf, Fotograf: Erinnerungen, Briefe, Schriften*, ed. S. Lissitzky-Küppers (Dresden: Verlag der Kunst, 1976), 341. Lapin has been acquainted with the magazine by Laarman. Leonhard Lapin, "The Estonian Avant-garde Tradition and Estonian-Russian Art Contacts," in *Tallinn–Moscow, 1956–1985*, ed. L. Lapin and A. Liivak (Tallinn: Tallinna Kunstihoone, 1996), 207.

ings, photographs, book illustrations, exhibition designs, and architectural projects and texts. The book was one of few compendious monographs of an avant-garde artist that reached Soviet Estonia.

Objective art was the art of the new industrial era; it was art that related to the industrial environment—artistically and morally. Lapin was convinced that art must intervene in and transform the everyday living space. This in the context of real socialism's highly suspicious (utopian) idea of a social mission of art leads to the constructivist aspect of the Soviet avant-garde and its appropriation by artists and architects in the 1970s. By then the constructivist avant-garde had been rehabilitated and was regarded as the predecessor of Soviet design. Yet the political—utopian—aspect that fascinated Estonian artists and especially Lapin is exceptional. In his speech given at the seminar in Harku, he appealed to the power of art to change the surrounding environment and with that to reform if not society and the system, then the way of life, thus picking up the very utopian aspect that had generally been considered to be of no relevance for postwar art practices.

In the history of Soviet-period art, reconstructed after Estonia gained its independence in 1991, this aspect has been widely left unnoticed, or rather reframed. Abstract art, like the geometric abstraction emerging in Estonia in the mid-1970s, has been interpreted as the "art of elegant refusal," which confronted the official demands on art like propaganda and education, with a "silent meaningful neutrality."[47] For the art discourse in the 1990s it was of particular importance: it allowed the autonomy of art to be shown and local art to be connected to the international (Western) discourse on art history. Lapin's turn to the Russian avant-garde of the 1920s was thus interpreted as a withdrawal from reality in search of "universal truths" and cosmic values.[48] Indeed, at the time of the Harku exhibition Lapin's former comrades-in-arms, Pop artists Ando Keskküla and Andres Tolts, had enjoyed an official breakthrough as painters, adapting hyperrealist techniques, which Lapin saw as a compromise with the system.[49] Lapin's appeal, I would like to argue, was motivated by a particular social situation of the 1970s, and by the demands it presented to the artists.

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47 Sirje Helme, "Artforumi ajad," in *1970ndate kultuuriruumi idealism. Lisandusi eesti kultuuriloole*, ed. S. Helme (Tallinn: Kaasaegse Kunsti Eesti Keskus, 2002), 16.

48 Helme and Kangilaski, *Lühike*, 210.

49 Leonhard Lapin, *Pimeydestä valoon. Viron taiteen avantgarde neuvostomiehityksen aikana* (Helsinki: Otava, 1996), 102.

The 1970s are described as the period of stagnation, with distinctive characteristics, such as the deadlock of public life and the withdrawal of the citizens into apolitical privacy. The hopes of reforms, of a new "socialism with a human face" had faded with the suppression of the demonstrations in Prague in 1968. Instead of engaging in public life and politics, the citizens started to arrange themselves: owning a car or a summer cottage counterbalanced collaboration with the system. These were the years in which typical Soviet society was taking shape.[50] The policy of détente announced at the 1975 Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe held in Helsinki was widely received in Eastern Europe as a legalization of the Soviet occupation and made for disillusionment.[51]

In the Soviet Union, the integration of the unofficial scene into the official structures had already begun in the late 1960s.[52] The question for the artists was how to engage in society without at the same time losing one's integrity. It was not about finding a safe, "uncontrolled" space outside the official art world, not about inner emigration, but about interfering in the official art world with new ideas in a meaningful and productive way. The potentiality for resistance consisted not in the "elegant refusal," but in the readiness to engage. Lapin called upon artists to define artistic practice, to give it a new and more constructive content. The position of Pop artists who started to take an interest in Soviet reality is thus complemented by the attempt to make this orientation to reality productive. The attitude of Pop artists, who had been approaching reality with parody, relativizing and ridiculing everything, did not seem relevant in the altered social context.

The subject was further formulated in a text entitled "Art against Art" that Lapin wrote the following year, in 1977.[53] He wrote: "Art is no longer happy

50 R. J. Misiunas and R. Taagepera, *The Baltic States: Years of Dependence, 1940–1990* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), 204–50.

51 Éva Forgács, "How the New Left Invented East-European Art," *Centropa* 2:3 (2003): 100–101. On the other hand, the Helsinki Accords with the demand of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of thought, provided fresh encouragement for the dissident and liberal movement.

52 Although one cannot speak of the endorsement abstract art was enjoying in Yugoslavia or Poland, from 1966 onward, abstract art was accepted in official exhibitions in Estonia. The border between official and unofficial was becoming blurred; it had more to do with particular works and artists than with the style.

53 The text was published in a typewritten manuscript collection of articles in the same year. It has never been reprinted or published officially; for example, it is missing in the collection of his writings on art and architecture with the significant title "Two arts," which Lapin published in 1997. It means that these ideas have possibly lost their relevance for Lapin. However, this does not mean that it was not important in 1977 when

onanism in the bathroom with Finnish [*i.e., foreign—M. L.*] furniture."[54] He compared the contemporary artist with a philistine who is entertaining himself "in the morgue of material prosperity and intellectual conformity" and whose awareness of reality is limited to "apartment, pub and office."[55] The text reads like a critique of the hedonistic strategies of Pop art (although Lapin does not mention it directly). Pop art was mimicking Soviet reality and its absurd rituals, but it did not transform it. The artist discussed here had given up the idealistic idea that one could exist outside society, that there could be an independent unofficial realm parallel to the official one, as the first generation of unofficial artists believed; they were looking for a more self-critical position in the system. With inner emigration, neutrality is confronted with an approach that has its origins in constructivism, in the belief that art can and must change society.

For this, the field of artistic practice was to be extended to the whole environment, at the same time overcoming the boundaries of different disciplines. The exhibition of new monumental art in 1976 could be an example where architecture and design discourses were introduced to redefine (monumental) art.[56] In "Art against Art," Lapin argued against the hierarchical differentiation of arts and called upon his colleagues to "protest against their profession." He wrote: "artists must view visual culture as a whole, a search for means which would eliminate boundaries between single fields: creative artists must not limit themselves to one art, but aspire toward all the techniques available."[57] He criticized the lack of unity in contemporary (modernist) art practice: its bureaucratic and hierarchical organization as it was made manifest in the structure of subassociations of the Artists' Union. He confronted it with an extensive artistic practice that would integrate all fields of life. Interdisciplinarity, the widening of artistic activity, was again a rhetori-

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he wrote the text. I would like to think that at that particular moment, it was his concern and the text was meant to be taken seriously.

54 Leonhard Lapin, "Kunstiga kunsti vastu," in *Artikleid ja ettekandeid kunstist 1967–1977* (manuscript collection, Tallinn, 1977), 78. (Manuscript in Leonhard Lapin's archive.)

55 Ibid., 77, 79.

56 The idea had already appeared in 1971, when Lapin gave a presentation with the programmatic title "Art Designing the Environment," where he proposed the creation of a new living environment involving every branch of art, from design to happenings. Lapin, Leonhard. "Taie kujundamas keskkonda," in Lapin, *Kaks*, 16–18.

57 Lapin "Kunst," 81.

cal means to address the institutions from which one was excluded.[58] It had to do with the self-positioning, with the uncertainty about one's function as an artist. It was a strategy about how to leave the normative, hierarchical institutional structure of art. At the same time, this step out of the predetermined frame was a redefinition of one's artistic position. With that, a new framework and criteria were established as grounds for the reevaluation of artistic practice. To give a new sense to art meant, among other things, defining a new field of artistic activity. In this case, the expansion of art, declaring the designing of new environments as the authentic goal of art, aimed to overcome the marginalization of one's art as merely private.

Objective art was the art of the new industrial reality and the technological era. Following the experiments of Pop art, its critique of the everyday and its interest in the new industrial and artificial environment gave it a constructive turn. It intended to engage with reality in the avant-garde (or constructivist) sense of the word.

Isolation was compensated by friendships,[59] viewing and analyzing each other's work in the studio or reading foreign publications.[60] The lack of information brought together creative people, regardless of their work that often developed in a different direction. Although Lapin had many friends in Moscow whom he visited frequently, his concept of objective art did not meet with a significant response or understanding in Moscow artistic circles. (At the same time Lapin himself was more fascinated by the Russian avant-garde.) One artist to whom the artistic concept of Lapin might have offered a more direct artistic point of reference was Vyatcheslav Koleichuk.

58 Andres Kurg, "Official Architecture, Unofficial Art. Two Exhibitions of the 'Tallinn School' in 1970s," in *Architecture+Art: New Visions, New Strategies*, ed. E.-L. Pelkonen and E. Laaksonen (Jyväskylä: Alvar Aalto Academy, 2007), 176–88.

59 While analyzing the reactions to the suffocating conquest of the private by ideology in totalitarian Soviet society, Slavoj Žižek mentions the "extraordinary flourishing of authentic friendship"—visits, dinners and close-circuit intellectual conversations. S. Žižek, *The Metastases of Enjoyment: Six Essays on Woman and Causality* (London: Verso, 1994), 64.

60 In a text composed for *Artforum*, the Russian artists Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid recall the Moscow readings of Western art magazines: "Ivan Chuikov was the only one of us who knew English, and we would gather and listen as he translated for us. . . . We pored over those glossy pages with reverence, scrutinizing the colored splashes of the reproductions, the self-expression of distant and unknown American souls, until our eyes blurred." Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid, "The Barren Flowers of Evil (1980)," in *Primary Documents: A Sourcebook for Eastern and Central European Art since the 1950s*, ed. L. Hoptman and T. Pospiszyl (New York, Cambridge, MA, and London: MIT Press, 2002), 258.

Koleichuk, who in the 1960s briefly participated in the Moscow group Dvizhenie, was interested in kinetic and constructivist art and found in Estonia the intellectual and artistic space that appeared to be closer to his own ideas, whereas "the artistic life of Moscow during the 1970s, its orientations and trends seemed to be very distant from my own interests which could be defined as the tasks of avant-garde art."[61]

61 Vyatcheslav Koleichuk, "Looked, Listened and Showed," in *Tallinn–Moscow, 1956–1985*, ed. L. Lapin and A. Liivak (Tallinn: Tallinna Kunstihoone, 1996), 241. In 1977 he had an exhibition at the Union of Estonian Architects in Tallinn.

19

Fluxus in Prague: The *Koncert Fluxu* of 1966

Petra Stegmann

"I don't like Fluxus"
—Jindřich Chalupecký, letter to Dick Higgins, 1965

"I feel that you have misunderstood the intentions of Fluxus"
—George Maciunas, letter to Jindřich Chalupecký, 1 October 1965

Although by the mid-1960s Fluxus[1] had been pronounced dead several times already,[2] in some environments it had merely been noticed. Nineteen

1 The term Fluxus, as I am using it here, denotes the works—actions and objects—by a loose network of artists, mainly held together by George Maciunas, a Lithuanian-born, New York-based artist, who gave Fluxus its name and who was the principal organizer of many activities and editor of various multiples (Fluxkits), and publications. The artists forming this continuously changing network did not follow a unified artistic program, but shared some concepts, like the idea that art must not necessarily be created as an object, and negated the notion of the artist as a creative genius. Typical for Fluxus works are "event" scores, that—contrary to happenings—can be performed time and again like musical works, as well as Fluxkits, little boxes offering possibilities for experience and experimentation. The sources for this text are mainly interviews with artists (Eric Andersen, Jeff Berner, Milan Knížák, Alison Knowles, and Ben Vautier), as well as correspondence and photographs in artists' archives (Eric Andersen, Jeff Berner, Milan Knížák, and Ben Vautier), in Fluxus archives (Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection, now in the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Archive Sohm, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart; Jean Brown Papers, Getty Research Institute Library, Los Angeles) as well as press reviews, published in Prague after the events.

2 Jürgen Becker, for example, wrote in 1965: "Fluxus ist, als Bewegung, vorerst schon gestorben." Jürgen Becker, "Einführung," in *Happenings. Fluxus, Pop Art, Nouveau Réalisme. Eine Dokumentation*, ed. Jürgen Becker and Wolf Vostell (Hamburg: Rowohlt 1965), 7.

sixty-six was a crucial date for the reception of Fluxus in some areas of Eastern Europe, since a number of significant, yet unrelated events took place: a series of performances by Eric Andersen, Tomas Schmit, and Arthur Køpcke in Club Reduta, Prague, from 5 to 7 April[3]; a Fluxus concert in Vilnius, organized by Vytautas Landsbergis with his students in the summer; and a festival in Prague on 13, 14, and 17 October with Ben Vautier, Jeff Berner, Serge Oldenbourg, Dick Higgins, and Alison Knowles[4]; this latter event, its preconditions, the course of events and the reception of Fluxus by the local protagonists will be the focus of this text.

As is well known, Eastern Europe had been the self-proclaimed "Fluxus chairman" George Maciunas's area of special interest, and he was convinced that especially cultural players of the Soviet Union had literally just been waiting to welcome Fluxus as an official state art. Thus, in his letters to Soviet cultural authorities he suggested a unification of the "revolutionary-realist society" of the USSR with the "revolutionary-realist artists of the world."[5] For the Fluxus "program" that, according to Maciunas, would be realized through a bilingual magazine and a worldwide concretist art and music festival, he was hoping for leadership through the Communist Part of the Soviet Union: "it was important in our belief that we should commence coordinating our efforts with the social-political aims of your party leadership."[6] Maciunas's ambitious plans, however, would never materialize, and the actual exchange between Fluxus artists and East European artists took place through initiatives by his colleagues, who—for the most part—did not share his political agenda, but were generally open to an exchange with like-minded artists around the world.[7]

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3 All three had been active in Fluxus but were "expelled" by Maciunas in 1964 as the result of an alleged tour of Eastern Europe with scandalous performances, while in fact it was only Eric and Tony Andersen who had traveled east and performed mainly in private apartments. See Eric Andersen, "The East Fluxus Tour 1964," in *Fluxus East. Fluxus-Netzwerke in Mittelosteuropa/Fluxus Networks in Central Eastern Europe*, ed. Petra Stegmann (Berlin: Künstlerhaus Bethanien, 2007), 53–62.

4 Apart from the events of 1966, two later significant events took place in Eastern Europe: a *Fluxconcert*, organized and performed by Tamás St. Auby (at that time: Szentjóby) in Budapest in 1969; and the much later Fluxus Festival Three Flux Days of Fun and the Fourth Day in a Flux Clinic (3 Dni Flux zabawy i czwarty w Flux klinice), organized by Jarosław Kozłowski in Galeria Akumulatory 2, Poznań.

5 George Maciunas, "Letter to Unnamed Soviet Cultural Authorities," n.d. [1962/1963], transcript, Archive Sohm, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart.

6 Ibid.

7 This interartistic exchange between Fluxus artists and artists in East-Central Europe was the focus of the exhibition *Fluxus East*, curated by Petra Stegmann, that was shown in Berlin, Vilnius, Krakow, Budapest, Tallinn, Copenhagen, and Oslo (2007–11).

Both festivals in Prague, in April and October 1966, were exceptional, since they were the only group performances by Fluxus artists in Eastern Europe, organized in the tradition of the festivals held in different Western European cities since summer 1962. The personal constellation of the events reflected the changes that the Fluxus network had undergone, with George Maciunas frequently expelling artists as a result of their misconduct. Also, the events in Prague in October were informed by tensions: Dick Higgins and Alison Knowles had fallen into disgrace with the foundation of Higgins's Something Else Press in 1963; Maciunas considered it to be a rival operation to his own publishing activities and thus what looked like a joint Fluxus festival was in fact two events, occurring at the same time. "It is mere chance," as Jindřich Chalupecký, the prominent art critic and main organizer of the *Koncert Fluxu*, pointed out to George Maciunas, "that Higgins, Knowles, Berner, Brecht et [sic] Vautier are coming to Prague at the same time,"[8] thus answering a reproach from George Maciunas: "I can't see any reason for arrival of Dick Higgins on same date, unless it is for the purpose of sabotaging fluxfest."[9]

The conditions for Fluxus were quite favorable in Prague. The time of the early 1960s up to the Prague Spring in 1968 was witnessing a relative liberalization in cultural life, although, as Herberta Masaryková wrote in a letter to Maciunas regarding the organization of a Fluxus concert in Prague: "however the situation is ever so much better, these things can be done only on sort of closed premises and for invited people (which is for the better sometimes)."[10] Also information about international art was accessible in various journals, although censorship had never been abandoned. Fluxus was being reflected as well,[11] and the articles and Fluxus works published in journals like *Výtvarné umění* and *Výtvarná práce* from 1966 onward served as an important source of information also in other countries belonging to the Warsaw Pact.

8 Jindřich Chalupecký, "Letter to George Maciunas, 25 September 1966," Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection, Museum of Modern Art, New York.

9 George Maciunas, "Letter to Jindřich Chalupecký, 15 September 1966," PNP (Památník národního písemnictví), Prague.

10 Herberta Masaryková, "Letter to George Maciunas, 9 February 1966," Silverman Collection, MoMA New York.

11 Pavlina Morganová, "Fluxus in the Czech Period Press," in *Fluxus East. Fluxus-Netzwerke in Mittelosteuropa/Fluxus Networks in Central Eastern Europe*, ed. Petra Stegmann (Berlin: Künstlerhaus Bethanien, 2007), 177–96.

As mentioned, the *Koncert Fluxu* was preceded by Andersen, Schmit, and Køpcke's series of events *nehudba, nedivadlo, neliteratura, neumění—advanced art, akce, nový realismus, happenings, event* in which, although not officially a Fluxus concert, the "event," a concept of great importance for Fluxus, was introduced and its opposition to "happenings" explained.[12] But also much earlier the audience in Prague had been exposed to action art—through the local artist Milan Knížák and his group Aktualní umění (Actual Art), that had been performing public manifestations and actions since 1964 and shared some ideas with Fluxus: a generally antiartistic stance, a focus on everyday activities and an interest in games.

Personal contacts between Czech artists and Fluxus associates had developed along various lines. The first personal encounters took place in autumn 1964 with Eric Andersen's legendary journey through Eastern Europe.[13] Chalupecký—who had seen Fluxus editions in Leningrad, when visiting the art critic Gurvič, who had been supplied with the material by Andersen—was also active in establishing contact with artists abroad and promoted Milan Knížák and Aktual.[14] Maciunas's first contact in Prague was Jiří Kolář, a "kind of Fluxus representative in Czechoslovakia,"[15] as he wrote, but he was also in an exchange with Vladimír Burda, Ladislav Novák, and others. Later—through Chalupecký's intermediation—Knížák became the primary contact person and was soon promoted to the rank of "Director Fluxus East," a title that, according to Knížák, "meant nothing."[16] Maciunas and Chalupecký, as mentioned above, were also in direct contact, but their relationship was strained, since Maciunas felt the Fluxus objectives to be misinterpreted by Chalupecký (whose critique of Fluxus will be discussed below):

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12 "They assured us that they don't stage real happenings, but so-called actions, events. Their work consists in collaboration with the audience, whom they set various tasks. . . . So we went to take a look at it in the evening. The happenists distributed slips of paper with writing, cotton balls, some sticks and similar objects. The participants began moving in various ways from one spot to another, from one room to another, without any system at all, but according to a given plan with given assignments." *Večerní Praha* (6 April 1966).

13 See Andersen, "The East Fluxus Tour"; Andersen had been in touch with Herberta Masaryková and Petr Kotík, among others.

14 Extensive documentation of Aktual's activities had been featured in Alan Kaprow's book *Assemblage, Environments & Happenings* in 1966.

15 George Maciunas, "Letter to Jindřich Chalupecký, 1 October 1965 (postmark)," PNP Prague.

16 "I knew my situation. I was a completely forgotten, young guy, living in Prague. I mean, no power, no nothing, and then I became the director of Fluxus East. . . . [Y]eah, it was fun, . . . but it means and it meant nothing, of course." Milan Knížák, interview by Petra Stegmann, Prague, 14 September 2006.

> I feel that you have misunderstood the intentions of Fluxus. Permit me to quote from our recent manifesto: Flux-art-nonart-amusement forgoes distinction between art and nonart, forgoes artist's indispensability, exclusiveness, individuality, ambition, foregoes all pretension toward significance, rarity, inspiration, skill, complexity, profundity, greatness, newness, shock, institutional and commodity value. It strives for monostructural, nontheatrical, nonbaroque, impersonal qualities of a simple natural event, an object, a game or a gag. It is a fusion of Spike Jones, gags, childrens games, John Cage & Duchamp.
> You will note our total lack of interest in sensations & shocks.[17]

The planning of the events and the course of actions can be reconstructed through extensive correspondence between George Maciunas and Vautier, Knížák, Chalupecký, and Berner. Photographs can be found in the archives of Milan Knížák and Ben Vautier, in Archive Sohm (Staatsgalerie Stuttgart) and in the Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection Gift (Museum of Modern Art New York).

In correspondence, Maciunas had mentioned his plan to travel to Prague, an opportunity that Chalupecký wanted to make use of in order to organize a Fluxus concert and a whole "*Festival of vanguard* (including lectures, films and concerts of new music)," that should coincide preferably with Andersen, Schmit, Köpcke, and Emmett Williams's journey to Prague, which was planned for the end of March 1966, and above all with the visit of Allan Kaprow, who had planned to come to Prague as well.[18] This idea was soon abandoned, however, and Chalupecký wrote about the plan of organizing single events instead of a festival.[19] Maciunas later had to give up his plans to travel to Prague for financial reasons, informing Chalupecký in a letter dated 15 September and at the same time announcing the arrival of Jeff Berner, Ben Vautier ("chief fluxorganizer in Europe and very active member"), and George Brecht "originator of Fluxus movement" (who would not be able to

17 George Maciunas, "Letter to Jindřich Chalupecký, 1 October 1965 (postmark)," PNP Prague. The quotation from the manifesto would later be printed on the invitation card to the Prague Fluxus festival.

18 Jindřich Chalupecký, "Letter to George Maciunas, 18 January 1966," Silverman Collection, MoMA New York.

19 Jindřich Chalupecký, "Letter to George Maciunas, 9 February 1966," Silverman Collection, MoMA New York.

travel in the end).[20] By this time Knížák is already mentioned as a "full fluxus member"[21] and, according to Maciunas, in charge of organizing the festival, although the main part of the organization would not have been possible without Chalupecký, who through his contacts and influence was able to obtain the performance venues and support for the financial side of the events. But not only was the relationship between the Western artists difficult, as Chalupecký pointed out: "I know you are now not in good contact with Higgins. And I am not in good contact with Knížák. Therefore it will be a little complicated."[22]

Performances took place on three evenings, although the invitation card originally listed four planned evenings, three "Fluxus concerts" (*Koncert Fluxu*) for 13, 17, 18 October and one evening of "Games" (*Hry*).

On 10 October, Vautier left for Prague in his "Car Fluxus" (a small van with Vautier's signature written all over it and a wooden roof that could be used as a stage) together with Serge Oldenbourg and $100 in his pocket, reaching the city on 12 October: "very Sad country No lights Bad roads etc.—Arrived in Prague went to Knizak's house Marvelous Street [Nový Svět]—Marvelous *fellow* very clear—and simple."[23] Just after the arrival a first action took place: "Straight away first Night we arrived we did a street piece in front of Knizak house Serge and I—eat on top of my car with table and chairs etc."[24]

Early the next day (13 October), Vautier visited the performance venue: "Director of the Club told me that Chalupecký was against Ben Vautier and had decided in giving a Concert only for Higgins at the National Museum."[25] But Vautier and Higgins agreed to perform together on all evenings, a fact that Vautier defends, claiming that too few "professional performers" were present. Around noon the Californian Fluxus artist Jeff Berner arrived by plane. A rehearsal took place in the afternoon, and Vautier realized: "By the

20 George Maciunas, "Letter to Jindřich Chalupecký, 15 September 1966," PNP, Prague.
21 Ibid.
22 Jindřich Chalupecký, "Letter to George Maciunas, 9 September 1966," Silverman Collection, MoMA New York.
23 Ben Vautier, "Letter to George Maciunas, n.d., October/November 1966," Jean Brown Papers, Getty Research Institute Library, Los Angeles. Please note that Vautier's unconventional orthography was kept in his quotations.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.

Figure 19.1.
Milan Knížák, Serge Oldenbourg and Ben Vautier performing Robert Watts's *Trace for Orchestra*, October 13, 1966. Photo: Archive Ben Vautier.

Way Knizak had no Performance Experience Jeff Neither only Myself Serge Dick and Allison—Repetition went Well."[26]

Although Maciunas had sent Knížák and Vautier detailed suggestions for performances, the "Proposed Program for a Fluxfest in Prague" (1966), with a long collection of pieces, a list of thirty-one stage props (fan, wind machine, packing paper, toys, a grand piano, a piano, a ladder, etc.) and the demand for an orchestra of fifteen to twenty nonprofessional musicians, it was ignored

26 Ibid.

by Vautier for the most part.[27] Maciunas had planned that Knížák should be the conductor "since he put so much effort in organizing the events,"[28] the evening itself, however, was organized and directed entirely by Ben Vautier, who complained that except for a piano "*No* Material was ready."[29] The concert took place in front of a large audience (of around 150 to 200) in Klub Umelců, in the Manes Exhibition Hall (Vystavni sin Manes), a central exhibition space in Prague.

It began with Vautier's *Tying up Piece for Christo* in which Jeff Berner was tied up with a white cotton string, while seated on a chair, and removed from stage at eight o'clock, after which a talk about Fluxus was commenced by a "Tchek official,"[30] Vladimír Burda. The concert contained a cross section of Fluxus classics, like Mieko Shiomi's *Disappearing Music for Face*, in which a performer slowly transforms a smile into a neutral expression; George Maciunas's *In Memoriam to Adriano Olivetti*, a number is assigned to each performer, who performs an action (lifting a bowler hat, making a sound with the mouth, opening/closing an umbrella, etc.) each time when his/her number appears on a row of an adding machine paper roll, which is indicated by the beat of a metronome; Nam June Paik's *One for Violin Solo*, with a violin that is gradually lifted up by a performer in very slow motion over his head, and then quickly smashed into pieces on a table; Ben Vautier's *Apples*, the action of which consists simply of the performers eating apples; but also less-known compositions like René Koering's *Piano Concerto*, with two players at a piano, trying to occupy the other's territory. According to Vautier, Ben Patterson's *Paper Piece* and his own *Plastique*[31] were especially successful during this evening.[32]

The second evening was planned as an accompanying program to the exhibition *Avantgardní edice* (organized by Chalupecký, running until 23 Oc-

27 In the 1980s, the correspondence between Maciunas and Knížák as well as the "Proposed Program for a Fluxfest in Prague" were published in Petr Rezek's samizdat anthology *Korespondence Fluxu*.

28 George Maciunas, "Letter to Ben Vautier, n.d., 1966," Silverman Collection, MoMA New York.

29 Ben Vautier, "Letter to George Maciunas, n.d., October/November 1966," Jean Brown Papers, Getty Research Institute Library, Los Angeles.

30 Ibid.

31 The piece, which is called "*Plastique*" here, is obviously the same that Vautier usually calls *Public Amusement* or *Baudruche*, see below.

32 Ben Vautier, "Letter to George Maciunas, n.d., October/November 1966," Jean Brown Papers, Getty Research Institute Library, Los Angeles.

tober 1966, and described by Vautier as "very well done"[33]), presenting artistic publications, among others by Higgins's Something Else Press as well as Fluxus editions. It took place in the Museum of National Literature, Strahov monastery. After an introduction by Chalupecký, mainly pieces by Dick Higgins and Alison Knowles were featured, as well as compositions by Jackson Mac Low, Emmett Williams, and Philip Corner. The evening was styled as a lecture performance, with Higgins giving "a very long *talk* on his works with Slides—Cutting it with Pieces exeples [sic] very Proffesor [sic] like."[34] The most successful pieces, according to Vautier, were his *Public Amusement*, also known as *Baudruche*, and Dick Higgins's *Danger Music #3*, which consisted of incense sticks being handed to the audience. This event was also mentioned by Bohumila Grögerová and Josef Hiršal: "In the hall, everybody was handed a handful of incense sticks, giving off a scent of sandal wood and flickering like fireflies. That was probably the most expressive number."[35] For *Public Amusement* Vautier "blew a big, big, big tube of plastic, which was like a huge snake" as Milan Knížák describes: "and people were very happy . . . and went down to the city. Because it was on the hill beside the castle, and there is a slope, and the people went down . . . carrying that big snake, and in the end police came."[36] The aspect of the spectators' participation (to which I will return) is missing from most Fluxus pieces, but it was important to Vautier in this piece: "Because we wanted always to finish up the concert with the public participating. . . . most of the pieces by George Brecht and by Robert Watts were pieces, where we show the public something, but they don't participate."[37]

Nevertheless, Vautier writes that the Fluxus evening (13 October) was the more successful event; "at least 10 people and 1 top official Government Critique official much higher then Chalupecký said that Fluxus evening was less boring and better."[38] Also in Knížák's opinion *Public Amusement* was the highlight of the events: "That was very nice, symbolic, people liked very much

33 Ibid.
34 Ibid.
35 English translation Petra Stegmann; Bohumila Grögerová and Josef Hiršal, *Let let. Pokus o rekapitulaci, Vol. 3* (Praha: Mladá fronta, 1994), 86.
36 Milan Knížák, interview by Petra Stegmann, Prague, 14 September 2006.
37 Ben Vautier, interview by Petra Stegmann, Nice, 10 April 2011.
38 Ben Vautier, "Letter to George Maciunas, n.d., October/November 1966," Jean Brown Papers, Getty Research Institute Library, Los Angeles.

to join the performance and it went far out than Ben was expecting." Also he stresses the aspect of public participation and unpretentiousness:

> I would say, the best part of the Festival was this part, which was very natural, which went out of the closed rooms, no performance, and no stage, and no audience, all together, totally mixed. And this I think was typical for Prague, typical because they knew our activities, . . . they wanted to go out, they didn't want to do closed things.[39]

Vautier, Higgins, Knowles, and Berner had left long before the last Fluxus evening took place, with only Serge Oldenbourg performing. Vautier was scheduled to stay until 18 October, but he departed early for financial and personal reasons:

> 1) I thought it better to leave on a *good impression* since I had played best pieces on the 13th. . . . 2) also the place was in a gallery—with No chairs 3) had very little mony left 4) Higgins and Jeff had left or were leaving so I had no actors 5) Very little corporation [sic] from the Gallery for help etc—So I decided to leave but Serge refused—he wanted to play.[40]

The course of the evening, which took place in an artists' club, is not easy to reconstruct. The few existing photos suggest that Ben Patterson's *Paper Piece* played an important role. But this evening was especially memorable for the events that were to follow. After the concert, and obviously intoxicated, Serge Oldenbourg gave his passport to a Slovak soldier, who successfully fled to the West with it, which led to Oldenbourg's and also Knížák's temporary arrest.[41] Maciunas was more concerned about the possible consequences for Fluxus than about Oldenbourg's uncertain future:

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39 Milan Knížák, interview by Petra Stegmann, Prague, 14 September 2006.

40 Ben Vautier, "Letter to George Maciunas, n.d., October/November 1966," Jean Brown Papers, Getty Research Institute Library, Los Angeles. Emphasis in original.

41 For Knížák this had been the second arrest during the Fluxus festival, since some days earlier he had been picked up by the police and brought to Ruzyně prison, where his long hair had been shaved, since a doctor had declared that Knížák had lice. See Milan Knížák, "A-Community 1963–1971," in *Fluxus East. Fluxus-Netzwerke in Mittelosteuropa/Fluxus Networks in Central Eastern Europe*, ed. Petra Stegmann (Berlin: Künstlerhaus Bethanien, 2007), 90.

> It seems a very serious problem is being created for us. It may be a worst sabotage of Fluxus yet. . . . This would be the death blow to Fluxus in all East Europe and USSR, since we would be suspect as US Central Inteligence [sic] agents. . . .
> 1 We must denounce & renounce Oldenbourg as irresponsible and make it clear that he never was Fluxus member.
> 2 We must try to catch the defector with Oldenbourg passport. . . . The defector may be comming [sic] . . . You must try to establish contact and get his confidence. When you know his whereabouts quickly Telefone Czech embassy in Paris.[42]

After fourteen months Oldenbourg was finally released from prison, later on giving an account of his time in jail in his book *Journal de prison*, and reflecting on the experience in his works, for example self-portraits behind barbed wire.[43]

Although the festival seems to have been successful—"Many people, a great interest, a real success"[44]—especially in regard to the positive response to Vautier's *Public Amusement*, which joined spectators and passers-by in a simple, joyful action, Fluxus in general provoked ambivalent reactions, ironically, in particular, among the organizers of the events: Chalupecký and Knížák. Long before his first personal encounter with Fluxus artists, Chalupecký had criticized the scandalous aspects (as they were presented, for example, in Nam June Paik's pieces) and also Maciunas's design of Fluxus publications (although he did appreciate the works of Ben Patterson). Chalupecký wrote in a letter to Dick Higgins:

> I don't like Fluxus. I have various numbers of *TRE V*,[45] and I'm rather disappointed by them. These big collages—what a difference between them and those of Hausmann and Baader, dated 1920! Basically these

42 George Maciunas, "Letter to Ben Vautier, 23 November 1966 (postmark)," Silverman Collection, MoMA New York.

43 "For years after the event, Serge Oldenbourg lived the life of a victim of Bolshevism and based his career on it from then on." Knížák, "A-Community 1963–1971," 90.

44 Jindřich Chalupecký, "Letter to George Maciunas, 16 November 1966 (postmark)," Silverman Collection, MoMA New York.

45 Chalupecký refers to the *V TRE* magazines, that were very much informed by Maciunas's graphic design, which was controversial also among the Fluxus artists themselves.

Figure 19.2.
Audience members performing Ben Vautier's *Public Amusement / Baudruche de Ben* after the concert, October 14, 1966. Photo: Archive Ben Vautier.

were aggressive, offensive, but I have the impression that those of Fluxus are something ornamental. The latter antiart is basically awfully awfully artistic. To shock? What can shock us now! After the second world war, after Auschwitz and Hiroshima—are we really to be shocked by a pissing contest? . . . sure, for the snobs,—but for me?[46]

46 Jindřich Chalupecký, "Letter to Dick Higgins, translated into English from the original French by D. H. [Dick Higgins?], n.d. [1965] copy," Archive Sohm, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart. Higgins sent copies of this letter to Tomas Schmit, George Brecht, Jackson Mac Low, Al Hansen, Allan Kaprow, Jerome Rothenburg, George Maciunas, Ben Patterson, and Robert Filliou with the remark "I THINK THAT WE SHOULD DEFINITELY SEND THIS MAN MATERIALS."

In a letter to Maciunas—who had been forwarded Chalupecký's critique, to which he had responded by quoting his Fluxus manifesto (see above)—the Czech critic modifies his critique and mentions that he had never seen a Fluxus concert.[47] In Fluxus according to Chalupecký, the artwork's "consistent internalization" ("konsequente Verinnerlichung") is important, of which only a "psychic action" is to remain, possibly without a material carrier.[48] In a later letter, shortly before the concerts in October, Chalupecký repeats his "definite critical reservations against Fluxus," stating that his "views are closer to Higgins's and Kaprow's."[49]

Although Fluxus in some performances could be shocking and destructive, as Chalupecký criticized, the actions did not go as far as Aktual's street actions that had left the realm of art altogether and melted into everyday life in the streets of Prague, in sharp contrast to Fluxus that insisted on artificially staged situations and even on formal clothing, with references to Vaudeville, cabaret, and stressing its musical background. "But for all of us here we had a feeling that this kind of art should be very social, very normal, very average, let's say, and all these Fluxus activities seemed to us to be very chamber-like"[50]—as Milan Knížák pointed out.

And although the "Director Fluxus East" did perform in the Fluxus events in Prague, he chose not to contribute any actions of his own, although at that time a Fluxus edition of his works was already in the planning.[51] Also Chalupecký's suggestion to Maciunas to "insert in your evening the phonic

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47 Jindřich Chalupecký, "Letter to George Maciunas, 16 November 1965 (postmark)," Silverman Collection, MoMA New York.

48 Ibid. "Ich glaube, daß die Fluxus-Aktivität von einer großen Bedeutung ist. Was darin das wichtigste ist, ist die konsequente Verinnerlichung des Kunstwerkes; es soll von ihm nur seine psychische Aktion bleiben, womöglich ohne irgendeinen materiellen Träger. . . . Aber dann muß man von Fluxus unterscheiden: a) alles was theatralisch und großartig ist . . . b) alle neo—weil diese neo . . . schon von der Außenseite der modernen Kunst inspiriert sind. Dazu gehört auch die Ausstattung Ihrer Zeitung."

49 Jindřich Chalupecký, "Letter to George Maciunas, 25 September 1965," Silverman Collection, MoMA New York.

50 Milan Knížák, interview by Petra Stegmann, Prague, 14 September 2006.

51 Later Knížák criticized Maciunas for reediting his *Actions for Fluxus*, that were printed in a compilation of Fluxus scores, the *Fluxfest Sale*, where—to give an example—Knížák's action "paper birds are given to all of the crowd" was transformed by Maciunas into an event called *Snowstorm No. 1*, the instruction of which reads "Paper gliders are distributed to an idle and waiting audience," causing Knížák to comment "George Maciunas reedited it! BAD! TOO ARTIFICIAL! MY OWN WORKS ARE VERY NATURAL!" Comment on a piece of paper torn from Flux Fest Sale as part of his book *Some Texts of Works by Milan Knížák*, Archive Sohm, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart.

poems (on tapes) of Ladislav Novák"[52] was not taken up, Maciunas had not reacted on the suggestion, and Vautier may have been more focused on organizing a classic Fluxus concert than on an interartistic exchange. Thus, the Prague Fluxus concerts were more of an import than a collaboration, which was not typical, especially of the early Fluxus concerts, where contributions from local artists were generally cherished and often brought to further Fluxus events in different cities, leading to the continuous growth and development of the Fluxus network.

Also after the Prague events of 1966 the interartistic exchange continued and developed in quality. Knížák spent time in the US in 1968 and 1969, working together with Fluxus artists in New York and performing a few actions in the US. An interesting part of the artistic exchange, however, would still develop in the years to come. Some artists from Czechoslovakia created event scores, obviously inspired by those of George Brecht, Mieko Shiomi, or Robert Watts, and he used these as a means of interartistic exchange. Vladimir Burda, Jiří Valoch, Jiří Hynek Kocman, and even Petr Štembera, who is especially known for his radical body actions, created these works and even a few editions, calling to mind Fluxkits, that seem to have been created for the sole purpose of international exchange, since these works are usually in English and can be found mostly in (Western) artists' archives.[53] But this should be the focus of another study.

52 Jindřich Chalupecký, "Letter to George Maciunas, 11 September 1966," Silverman Collection, MoMA New York.

53 While researching in Eric Andersen's archive various examples were found.

20

International Contact with Mail Art in the Spirit of Peaceful Coexistence: Birger Jesch's Mail Art Project (1980–81)

Stefanie Schwabe

Mail art is a form of conceptual art that is based, theoretically, on the artistic idea as a concept and that can practically renounce its materialization by an object of art. What is important is the content of the object—the conception and diffusion of ideas—and not the form. With its roots in the work of Marcel Duchamp, mail art was initiated in the 1960s as an artistic and political concept under the name of correspondence art by the American Ray Johnson. Thanks to the small format of the objects sent and the variety of the concept itself, mail art quickly found enthusiasts throughout the world.

Every visual expression has an individual identity before the context of an international social network built through the postal system between sender and recipient. Mail art thus existed through the creation of projects by a sender who required the recipients to send their work by post, in accordance with the three rules "No jury! No return! No fee!" In return, the initiator of the project was required to send documentation,[1] which often amounted to

1 With regard to the writing of such documentation, it should be noted that the East German artists were subject to the reproduction laws of the GDR of 20 July 1959, which prohibited any reproduction not authorized by the state, even on a small scale. This also applied to the tools of reproduction, such as the stamps

a simple list of the names and addresses of the participants, and organize an exhibition of the project in the form of a mail art show.[2] The creation of this kind of artistic and intellectual network, enabling communication beyond any geographical border between the countries of the Eastern Bloc, such as the GDR, and the rest of the world, was achieved despite the controls and censorship exercised by the Stasi, which ultimately became an integral part of this distance communication network. Because in the GDR, the distance communication systems, such as the post, the telephone, the radio or even the television, were controlled and censored by the state authorities. Despite this, mail art, which passed through the postal system and thus through an institution of the Stasi—which had installed control units within the East German postal establishments[3]—was felt by the East German mail artists to be like "an open window onto the world," like a sort of sign of existence. The majority of objects sent referred to surveillance by the Stasi and directly criticized the existing political system. Regarding this transgression of real borders through the postal system, the Polish mail artist Piotr Rypson wrote the following to the (West) German mail artist and art historian Klaus Groh[4]: "Mail Art is stateless, it needs neither visas nor passports. Mail Art promotes

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that the mail artists used to make. Some printing presses had special licenses for printing up to 250 copies without prior authorization, but only for the artists who were members of the artists' union. One reproduction method that was fairly easily accessible in the GDR was photography, as many amateur photographers or artists had dark rooms.

2 The mail art shows were generally held on the premises of the East German Church, which played an important role with regard to the opposition as a political representative of the East German people. It was an independent social organization formally recognized as such since the meetings on 6 March 1978 in East Berlin between the head of state, Erich Honecker, and the General Committee of the League of Evangelical Churches in the GDR. From the mid-1970s, there was a multifarious oppositional scene at the heart of, and outside, the church. The conference on 6 March 1978 represented a sort of political truce that was intended to make the church a stabilizing factor to legitimize the SED dictatorship. From the beginning of the 1980s, more or less independent opposition groups formed within the church, which saw itself officially as neutral ground, with reference to its rights as set forth in the constitution of the GDR. During the 1980s, the church became an important place of artistic expression that did not conform with the doctrine of socialist realism. In the GDR, the church was an alternative place, a kind of other officialdom.

3 See Veit Lemmrich, "Ist Post da? Joachim Stange, DDR-Bürger, Mail-Artist, MfS- Aktennummer 73313," in *Ein offenes Geheimnis: Post- und Telefonkontrolle in der DDR*, ed. Joachim Kallinich and Sylvia De Pasquale (Berlin: Museumstiftung Post und Telekommunikation, 2002), 90–101.

4 Klaus Groh is a German artist and art historian who was born in 1936 in what was then Poland and who lives in the Lower Saxony region (in northwest Germany). During the Cold War, he played an important role in the circulation of conceptual art in Europe. In 1972, he published a book in German entitled *Aktuelle Kunst in Osteuropa* which was dedicated to alternative art in Yugoslavia, Poland, Romania, the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary. Cf. Klaus Groh, *Aktuelle Kunst in Osteuropa* (Cologne: Dumont, 1972).

collective activities. Mail Art is common fun."[5] The aesthetic objects received from all corners of the world also represented a real sense of hope and freedom for their recipients. The context of cultural control, censorship, and oppression created by the activities of the Stasi encouraged mail artists to play with these constraints in order to express their freedom of thought. The utterances communicated via mail art were intended to function as a kind of pacifist weapon, as the target gun project of Birger Jesch illustrated so well. The objects sent thus tended to have two addressees: a direct addressee who was the person whose address appeared on the object, and an indirect addressee, which was the Stasi.

For example, Robert Rehfeldt[6] sent a card with the wording "Bitte denken Sie jetzt nicht an mich" (Please don't think of me now). Some artists also placed carbon paper in the envelopes, which, when opened with steam, stained the contents and made it impossible to read or deliver the contents without leaving traces of the envelope having been opened. Others placed multiple objects in different envelopes and then posted them in different post boxes situated far away from each other. To remove traces of having opened post or to make fake documents, Stasi agents recreated identical foreign stamps. Without knowing, the mail artists repeated this illegal act performed by the authorities by producing home-made stamps that looked official, or by ordering them in the GDR to have them illegally imported. The symbolism of the images and wording used by East German mail artists often presented the Stasi with a reading problem. Some objects escaped control, others were opened and copied by the secret services to then be resealed and deliv-

5 Cf. Klaus Groh, "Correspondence Art/Mail Art: eine Kunst von unten," n.d., Rennes (France), Archives de la Critique d'art, Fonds Pierre Restany, PREST,XT028/7–11. Or see Piotr Rypson, "Mail Art Objects, Collections and Archives," in *Mail Art: Osteuropa im internationalen Netzwerk*, ed. Kornelia Berswordt-Wallrabe and Kornelia Röder (Schwerin: Staatliches Museum, 1996), 268.

6 Concerning the GDR, it was Robert Rehfeldt (1931–1993) who had his first mail art contact with, and according to, Klaus Groh, from 1967 and then thanks to the Polish artistic network, which he joined in 1971. Cf. Interview in Kornelia Berswordt-Wallrabe and Kornelia Röder, eds., *Mail Art: Osteuropa im internationalen Netzwerk* (Schwerin: Staatliches Museum, 1996), 125–45. Robert Rehfeldt was part of the alternative East Berlin scene of Prenzlauer Berg. It was from this scene that the concept of mail art was quickly distributed among other alternative scenes, such as the one surrounding the gallery and the group of artists of Clara Mosch in Karl-Marx-Stadt (now Chemnitz), or that in Dresden. Robert Rehfeldt took part in several international projects, and the French art critic Raoul-Jean Moulin—whose archives are located at MacVal in Vitry-sur-Seine—dedicated two articles to him in the French daily *L'Humanité*, without mentioning the alternative network in the GDR in which Robert Rehfeldt was involved. See Raoul-Jean Moulin, "Robert Rehfeldt," *L'Humanité*, 17 September 1974 and 17 May 1975.

ered without major delay, or they were taken away and archived without ever reaching the direct addressee.

It should be noted that this form of conceptual art was, above all, of a subversive nature, but it could not necessarily be considered oppositional. It was a form of *Eigensinn* (self-will) because on the one hand, mail artists were trying to get round the political system by playing with the administrative system (the law, the postal service, the Stasi) and on the other hand, this art form served as a stabilizer for a system that artists did not want to see disappear (as was the case after the fall of the Wall), but that they wanted to change actively.

For the mail artists of the Western Bloc, it was the imaginary and material transgression of geopolitical borders and ideological norms that was relevant. At the same time, it was about questioning the commercial laws of the GDR art market, even though the latter was almost nonexistent. In the GDR, mail art was not recognized as an artistic form by the official discourse on art,[7] and its import and export via the postal route were thus not subjected to the commercial constraints imposed by the authorities. In a communication from 1976 entitled "Alternativen in der sozialistischen Kunstproduktion" (Alternatives in the production of socialist art),[8] Klaus Groh stressed the alternative nature of mail art in relation to the art market, but also lamented, as a consequence of this lack of commercial value, the fact that the alternative artists of the countries considered socialist were not respected by the art managers of the Western countries.

The East German mail artists, who amounted to some eighty people at the end of the GDR and of whom 10% were women, got round the authorities on several levels. Firstly, at the legal level with regard to the law on printing and reproduction. Secondly, at the postal level, as the mail artists used the postal service's general conditions of sale to harm the system and claim compensation for lost post—a recorded delivery cost around 50 pfennig at the time and compensation of 40 marks was paid in the event of loss.[9] Thirdly, the

7 It was not until 1971 that the French art critic Jean-Marc Poinsot introduced theoretically this notion in his work, written in French and English, entitled *Mail art, communication à distance, concept*. This notion then became widespread throughout the world. See Jean-Marc Poinsot, *Mail art, communication à distance, concept* (Paris: CEDIC, 1971).

8 Klaus Groh, *Alternativen in der sozialistischen Kunstproduktion*, 1976 (4 pages, A4 format), Rennes (France), Archives de la Critique d'art, Fonds Pierre Restany, PREST.XT028/12.

9 Compensation was sometimes refused as it apparently went against "socialist morals" to send certain objects.

mail artists played with the Stasi by sending them indirectly the contents of their post—and sometimes even in English, a language the Stasi agents knew less well than the mail artists. And finally, at the commercial level by getting round the laws of the art market concerning the spreading and recognition of works of art.

Finally, although mail art gave the impression of being a kind of window onto the world, this did not necessarily mean that the mail artists wanted to leave the GDR. A large majority of the actors in the East German alternative artistic scenes believed in creativity as a force to change society. Proceeding from this belief, it was also the context of the Cold War and the Western Bloc that was largely the generator of these forms of alternative, subversive, and critical art.

This was, therefore, an exchange of material and symbolic goods that communicated information in the form of messages intended to criticize the GDR system, denounce the destruction of the environment, protest against nuclear weapons or caricature human behavior. For the mail artists, this was about defending the freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom to travel and artistic freedom, among other things.[10] Despite the violation of postal secrecy by the Stasi, which controlled, documented, and retained certain consignments, the establishment of contact was, nevertheless, the most important aspect. Moreover, Robert Rehfeldt created the notion of CONT-ART to describe this avant-gardist tendency that placed the emphasis on communication. For the Berlin mail artist Lutz Wohlrab, mail art represented a sort of psychotherapy for the participants.[11]

One of the artists who was most engaged in the area of mail art was Birger Jesch, who lived in Dresden at the time. His first mail art contacts were, among others, Robert Rehfeldt, the Frenchman Robert Filliou (1926–1987) and the Chilean Dámaso Ogaz (1924–1990).[12] He was also inspired by the photomontages of Klaus Staeck[13] that were exhibited in the GDR at the end

10 Lutz Wohlrab, "Bitte sauber öffnen! Danke Mail Art und Postkontrolle in der DDR," *Horch und Guck* 38 (2002): 42–46.

11 Tilman Baumgärtel, "Mail Art: Ein Gespräch mit Friedrich Winnes, Lutz Wohlrab, Thomas Schulz, Graf Haufen, Waling Boers," *Rohrpost*, 4 November 2002.

12 Interview, 1995, http://www.iuoma.org/birger.html.

13 Interview in Kornelia Berswordt-Wallrabe and Kornelia Röder, eds., *Mail Art: Osteuropa im internationalen Netzwerk*, 85.

of the 1970s. He also corresponded with a certain Volker Hamann, who lived in West Berlin at the time and who illegally imported texts on mail art for the artist by leaving them in East Berlin with Robert Rehfeldt and Joseph Huber.[14] Together with the couple Martina and Steffen Giersch, Joachim Stange, and the printer and artist Jürgen Gottschalk, Birger Jesch formed, in Dresden, a small local network of mail artists which quickly became a target of the Stasi and the subject of an investigation procedure initially called OV "Postkunst" (Postal art) and then OV "Feind" (Enemy).

In the summer of 1980, Birger Jesch began his first mail art project—*International Contact with Mail Art in the Spirit of Peaceful Coexistence* (summer 1980–February 1981)—which was also the first project publicly exhibited in the GDR. The subject of this project was the relationship with the first peace movements led by the Church which, as we know, were the precursors to the 1989 pacifist revolution movements. The project involved sending an official unused shooting target—industrially produced in the GDR—to some 300 dispatchers around the world asking them to rework it (Plate 20.1).

Concerning the shooting target motif, one must mention here the creation of the International Artists' Cooperation (IAC) in February 1972 by Klaus Groh, who had already worked in 1975 on an unused target made in West Germany to signify that poetry was a way of shooting and that the IAC was a sporting association. But this was not about initiating a project by sending various identical objects—it was about an object of visual poetry.

Moreover, the target motif chosen by Birger Jesch transformed on the one hand the participating artists into pacifist marksmen of a kind and, on the other hand, the initiator of the project into a living target for the Stasi. Nonetheless, the mail artist received fifty objects back from twelve different countries in connection with this project. The documents and objects associated with this project are currently located at the mail art archives in Schwerin.[15] Kornelia Röder, who is in charge of these archives, has devoted a few lines to this project in her 2006 doctoral dissertation "Topologie und Funktionsweise des Netzwerks der Mail Art."[16] A few objects were also shown in

14 Interview, by Robert Sobotta and transcribed by Lutz Wohlrabkrauss, ERBEN gallery in Dresden, 4 May 2002.

15 See http://www.museum-schwerin.de/sammlungen/kupferstichkabinett/mail-art-archiv-3/.

16 Subsequently published as Kornelia Röder, *Topologie und Funktionsweise des Netzwerks der Mail Art: Seine spezifische Bedeutung für Osteuropa von 1960 bis 1989* (Bremen: Salon Verlag, 2008).

1996 in the exhibition *Osteuropa Mail Art im internationalen Netzwerk* at the Schwerin Museum.

Not only did Birger Jesch initiate this project, he also contributed himself with the creation of a three-dimensional object, but without using as a theme the fact that he had been targeted by the Stasi. To do this, he included in the shooting target a plastic toy that was made in East Germany—a miniature soldier of the National People's Army in a crouching position and aiming with his gun, ready to shoot. All of this is surrounded by partitions with a text from 1979 by the East German author Dieter Schneider: *Leb wohl, altes Haus!* (Farewell, old friend!). To the right of this is the cutting of a press photo showing the bust of a person wearing a microphone and censored by a black strip across the eyes. This pacifist work was part of the cultural context of the expatriation in 1976 of the author and singer Wolf Biermann, who sang, among other things, "Soldaten sehn sich alle gleich—lebendig und als Leich" (Soldiers all look the same, alive and dead), but also of the political context of the introduction of military service lessons in school. The project also seemed to be a response to the double decision by NATO on 12 December 1979, which planned for the installation of missiles in Western Europe in response to the Soviet SS-20s in order to begin negotiations and secure their removal within four years.[17]

The object of the project that has been most talked about, described, and reproduced by researchers dedicated to mail art in the GDR is that of Friedrich Winnes. His appeal lay in his fairly simple work, using graphic methods borrowed from the press, combining black, white and red; and he shocked people with the contents of photos showing the portraits of twelve men injured during the First World War.

Birger Jesch was aware of the link between the weak response to his project and the scrutiny of his post by the Stasi. Following these communication difficulties, he wrote a letter asking the senders to explain their failure to reply and to send the original post to the other participants. This action had a sort of snowball effect, and it allows us today to show, in relation to this project,

17 It must be noted here that the East German government, which was committed by the 1972 Basic Treaty with the FRG to a policy of détente and also to increasingly pronounced cultural exchanges with France—which approved the installation of US missiles on West German territory—tried to stay outside of the Soviet policy pursued against the United States.

how much post was intercepted by the Stasi. Birger Jesch thus suggested a choice between three responses: (a) I did not have the time (inclination), (b) I did not receive an invitation, and (c) I have sent you something.

Among the objects received, that of Klaus Groh demonstrated the difficulty of sending objects. In the text accompanying his two-dimensional and purely graphic work, he stressed the fact that this was already the third piece he had sent.

In the documentation dated 14 February 1981, Birger Jesch commented: "Thanks to the jury competences of the postal and customs services, one can consider this exhibition as having already been checked and authorized." This remark highlighted the fact that the mail artists were aware of the inevitable scrutiny of their post, without necessarily realizing the real extent of this surveillance and the methods of the Stasi. The project was framed not only by the documentation, but also by a touring exhibition showing all the objects that were sent back. These exhibitions took place on clerical premises in Dresden (February 1981, the Weinbergkirche), Radebeul, Meissen, Stralsund (13 November 1983), Greifswald (1983/84) and Rostock. On 15 October 1981, following the exhibitions for the project, the Stasi launched the "Feind" procedure—initially called "Postkunst"—which had the principle aim of breaking up the local network. The methods used consisted of confiscating post or refusing GDR entry visas to the invitees[18] of the five Dresden friends who had become the Stasi's target. Legal proceedings were also begun in 1982 against Birger Jesch and Steffen Giersch under the pretext of a customs offence, resulting in unequal fines of 500 marks for Jesch and 300 marks for Giersch.[19] The closing report of the proceedings was submitted three years later, on 1 October 1984: the circle of artist friends was considered to have disbanded, and mail art was seen as an ineffective oppositional method.[20] The person most affected by the Stasi methods was the

18 Manfred Rudolph, "Erfahrung bei der Realisierung von Massnahmen der Zersetzung zur wirksamen Bekämpfung/Zurückdrängung politischer Untergrundtätigkeit unter Einbeziehung von IM sowie staatlicher und gesellschaftlicher Kräfte," unpublished memoirs (Potsdam, 1988). Quotation from Lutz Wohlrab and Birger Jesch, "Feinde gibt es überall . . . Stasi und Mail Art in Dresden," *Horch und Guck* 19 (1996): 58–64.

19 Wohlrab, "Bitte sauber öffnen!"

20 Report from the *Enemy* proceedings. Quotation from: Heidrun Hannusch, "Wenn Pazifisten dem *Friedensstaat* gefährlich werden," *Dresdner Neueste Nachrichten*, 30 March 1993, 13.

artist and printer Jürgen Gottschalk, who was sentenced on 23 July 1984 to two years and two months in prison and was finally expatriated at the end of April 1985.[21]

In the GDR, mail art was an alternative form of art and communication that was born in the geopolitical and cultural interstice and aimed to transgress this border zone or theoretically displace it. This zone, this interstice, served as a sort of niche enabling mail artists to develop their own artistic identity despite the control by the state. The concept of mail art was a transnational concept enabling artists to go beyond the geopolitical realities of Europe in the 1970s and 1980s. With the fall of the Wall, the interstice of geopolitical and cultural limits in the GDR disappeared and with it the source of motivation and of identity creation.

21 Jürgen Gottschalk, *Druckstellen: die Zerstörung einer Künstler-Biographie durch die Stasi* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2006).

21

(Socialist) Realism Unbound: The Effects of International Encounters on Soviet Art Practice and Discourse in the Khrushchev Thaw

Susan E. Reid

When the French Marxist Roger Garaudy published his theory of "realism without bounds" (*D'un réalisme sans rivages*) in 1963, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) vociferously denounced him for revisionism and placed his heretical book on the blacklist.[1] Even to the last days of the Soviet Union, conservative aestheticians and art functionaries continued to resist any attempt to revise the conception of socialist realism or to sanction an ecumenical concept of what they disparagingly called "real-

1 Roger Garaudy, *D'un réalisme sans rivages: Picasso, Saint-John Perse, Kafka* (Paris: Plon, 1963). The present essay draws on material I have published elsewhere, including: Susan E. Reid, "Toward a New (Socialist) Realism: The Re-Engagement with Western Modernism in the Khrushchev Thaw," in *Russian Art and the West: A Century of Dialogue in Painting, Architecture and the Decorative Arts*, ed. Rosalind P. Blakesley and Susan E. Reid (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2007), 217–39; Susan E. Reid, "The Exhibition *Art of Socialist Countries*, Moscow 1958–9, and the Contemporary Style of Painting," in *Style and Socialism: Modernity and Material Culture in Post-War Eastern Europe*, ed. Susan E. Reid and David Crowley (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 101–32; Susan E. Reid, "The Soviet 'Contemporary Style': A Socialist Modernism," in *Different Modernisms, Different Avant-Gardes: Problems in Central and Eastern European Art After World War II*, ed. Helme Sirje (Tallinn: KUMU Art Museum, 2009), 71–112; Susan E. Reid, "Modernizing Socialist Realism in the Khrushchev Thaw: The Struggle for a Contemporary Style in Soviet Art," in *Dilemmas of De-Stalinization: Negotiating Cultural and Social Change in the Khrushchev Era*, ed. Polly Jones (London: Routledge Curzon, 2005), 209–30.

ism as a rubber sack."[2] Yet already by 1963 the Soviet art establishment was split into conservative or hard line and reformist, liberalizing, or modernizing camps committed to a new, "contemporary style" of realism.[3] A more radical fringe had also emerged. Condemned at the notorious Manège Affair at the end of 1962, it formed the new margin of permitted Soviet art, coming to be known (in the West) as the nonconformist or underground art world.[4] Indeed much of what Garaudy proposed was already under debate among reform-minded artists and critics in the Moscow art world since 1956. Against the jeremiads of the conservatives, modernizers sought a rejuvenated and elastically defined realism, a public art that could move and persuade and say something to contemporary people about the present day in a "contemporary" style. This article will consider the ways in which, beginning in the Khrushchev Thaw (c. 1953–62), the Soviet conception of socialist realism was challenged, fractured, and expanded thanks in part to encounters with art and artists of the "socialist countries" (*Sotsstran*) and, more broadly, to increased Soviet exposure to international socialist art, including that of postcolonial countries.

Between 1947 and 1953 Soviet cultural policy had become more deeply xenophobic, nationalistic, and autarkic than ever. At home, the newly established Academy of Arts along with the Arts Committee (which had overseen the purges in the art world during the Stalinist Terror) dogmatically insisted upon the pedigree purity of a Russian canon—based on the model of the nineteenth-century Russian realism of the Peredvizhniki—as the patrilineage of socialist realism, while "ethnically cleansing" alien influences. Modernism, identified with the West, had played a crucial constitutive and uni-

2 Russian State Archive of Contemporary History (Rossiskiy Gosudartsveiy Arkhiv Noveyshey Istorii, RGANI), f. 5, op. 36, d. 47, ll. 95–97; B. V. Vishniakov, "Ob odnoi kontseptsii iskusstva 1960–1980-kh godov," in *Puti tvorchestva i kritika* (Moscow: Izobrazitel'noe iskusstvo, 1990), 13; A. Metchenko, "Sotsialisticheskii realizm. Rasshiriaiushchiesia vozmozhnosti i teoreticheskie spory," *Oktiabr'* 4 (1976): 182–83; referring to V. Ivashev, "Pocherki novoi epokhi," *Voprosy literatury* 9 (1975).

3 Note the crucial distinction between reformism and revolution. Compare Stephen F. Cohen, "The Friends and Foes of Change: Reformism and Conservatism in the Soviet Union," in *The Soviet Union Since Stalin*, ed. Stephen F. Cohen, Alexander Rabinowitch, and Robert Sharlet (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), 11–12; M. R. Zezina, *Sovetskaia khudozhestvennaia intelligentsiia i vlast' v 1950-e-60-e gody* (Moscow: Dialog MGU, 1999).

4 Susan E. Reid, "In the Name of the People: The Manège Affair Revisited," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 6:4 (Fall 2005): 673–716; *"Drugoe iskusstvo": Moskva 1956–76*, 2 vols. (Moscow: Moskovskaia kollektsiia, 1991), vol. 1.

fying role as socialist realism's "other" from the start. But with the onset of the Cold War, the conflict between the "Two Camps" of East and West, socialism and capitalism, promulgated in 1947, found its cultural expression in the confrontation between realism and modernism. From the official Soviet perspective, modernism was the instrument of Western imperialism, and the art of socialist realism—healthy, progressive, and truthful—was irreconcilably opposed to this decadent, bourgeois-imperialist, antihumanist "antiart." Modernism was characterized by "its falseness, its belligerent antirealism, its hostility to objective knowledge and to the truthful portrayal of life in art."[5] The standoff between the opposing powers and their ideologies required the absolute antithesis of their cultural manifestations; no possibility for common ground or—*horribile dictu!*—convergence could be admitted.

In Central and Eastern Europe, meanwhile, cultural Sovietization attempted to impose Soviet Russian models of socialist realism in the newly subordinated countries. As imperial powers have often discovered, a degree of hybridization was required in order to indigenize it in local cultures. Nevertheless, the degree to which the subaltern cultures thereby exercised a reciprocal influence on the culture of the core was, at that time, limited.[6] Assessing the channels and direction of influence of *political* change in this period, Jacques Rupnik noted that Soviet adaptation to change initiated in Eastern Europe first came on the agenda in the Khrushchev era.[7] To what extent does Rupnik's assessment also apply to cultural change in the USSR, specifically visual art practice and policy? Were developments in the subaltern states of Central and Eastern Europe a catalyst and model for change in the Soviet art establishment, and, if so, what were the vectors of this communication (or as conservatives would see it, contamination)? We will consider here both the effects of encounters with art of socialist Europe, and also

5 Vladimir Kemenov, "Aspects of Two Cultures," in *Art in Theory, 1900–1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, ed. C. Harrison and P. Wood (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992), 647. First published in *VOKS Bulletin by the USSR Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries* (Moscow, 1947).

6 See Anders Aman, *Architecture and Ideology in Eastern Europe during the Stalin Era: An aspect of Cold War History* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1992); David Crowley, "Peoples Warsaw/Popular Warsaw," *Journal of Design History* 10:2 (1997): 203–24; Susan E. Reid and David Crowley, "Introduction: Style and Socialism," in *Style and Socialism: Modernity and Material Culture in Post-War Eastern Europe*, ed. Susan E. Reid and David Crowley (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 1–24.

7 Jacques Rupnik, "Soviet Adaptation to Change in Eastern Europe," *Journal of Communist Studies* 2–3 (1986): 251–62.

of wider exposure to European and world art. Often drawing on indigenous traditions that challenged the hegemony of European conventions of verisimilitude on which Russian realism was based, the art of the socialist world and postcolonial/revolutionary movements posed particular challenges to Soviet orthodoxy.

Soviet cultural politics began to change already in the early 1950s, before the process of de-Stalinization got under way in the fraternal countries, just as the USSR initially led the way in de-Stalinization in other respects. While the CPSU continued to claim a guiding role in cultural as in political matters, the regime's renunciation of terror and coercion as means of governing both Soviet society and its satellites necessitated accommodation with pressures for change coming both from below and from its allies abroad (although there were notable lapses: political violence was not renounced, for example, in Hungary in 1956).

In the international arena, by the mid-1950s the Cold War had entered a less tense phase. The principle of "Peaceful Coexistence" moderated the thesis of the "Two Camps," "Socialism in one country" was abandoned, and the project of international socialism, under Soviet leadership, was resumed, along with efforts to expand Soviet influence in the postcolonial world. Autarchy gave way to the aspiration to world cultural leadership in line with the Soviet Union's new geopolitical role.[8] International diplomacy and exchange were reestablished, and although this has been described as a "cultural offensive" against the West, it was also a matter of readiness to learn, the better to compete.[9] Nikita Khrushchev, Party first secretary, traveled avidly and applied the lessons of foreign experience back home, rallying his country to "catch up with and overtake the West." The realization that superpower status in the postwar world demanded cutting-edge science and technology made it necessary to allow Soviet scientists access to the latest foreign research. In relation to culture, too, the writer Ilya Ehrenburg publicly expressed hope that it would be possible "to set against the climate of 'Cold War' the spirit of gen-

8 N. P. Zhilina, ed., *Kul'turnaia zhizn' v SSSR, 1951–1965. Khronika* (Moscow: Nauka, 1979), 302–305; I. Gerchuk, "Iskusstvo 'ottepeli'. 1954–1964," *Voprosy iskusstvoznaniia* 8:1 (1996): 79.

9 Frederick C. Barghoorn, *The Soviet Cultural Offensive: The Role of Cultural Diplomacy in Soviet Foreign Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960); Yale Richmond, *Cultural Exchange & the Cold War: Raising the Iron Curtain* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003); Walter L. Hixson, *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture and the Cold War, 1945–1961* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997).

uine cultural cooperation and honest competition."[56] Trade, tourism, scientific and cultural exchange expanded, and cultural agreements were signed with the governments of capitalist countries including France, Great Britain, and the United States as well as with the Peoples' Democracies of Central and Eastern Europe.

The "fraternal" socialist countries represented an important resource in the push toward a new phase of technological modernization. While economic cooperation was assured by the formation of Comecon, the principle that they should pool not only their scientific but also their *cultural* achievements (and make these available to support Soviet development) was encoded in the CPSU's Third Party Program adopted in 1961.

The flow of information across borders increased enormously, as did possibilities to see foreign art and meet foreigners. As a result of foreign exchange agreements in the late 1950s, the Soviet public was increasingly exposed to exhibitions of contemporary international art, from the capitalist West, from the Peoples' Republics of Central and Eastern Europe, and also occasionally from Asia, Africa, and Latin America where the Soviet Union was extending its interests. In addition to travel and international exhibitions and festivals, foreign publications served an important role as sources of information. While the USIA (United States Information Agency) magazine *Amerika*, for example, propagandized the "American way of life" and also the latest US art and cutting-edge design, illustrated magazines from Eastern European countries were at least as influential, not least because they were more readily available at newsstands. They found a receptive audience attracted by their "Western"-seeming contents and by their modern design. As Russian art historian Iurii Gerchuk recalled: "Every decorative-painterly cover of the journal *Pol'sha* (Poland) behind a kiosk window seemed like a manifesto of new artistic possibilities. And for the 'minders' [of orthodoxy] the very word '*Pol'sha*' became an odious symbol of 'modernism' infiltrating the country."[10] Other periodicals of particular cultural importance included the Polish *Przekroj* (Profile) and, for art specialists, the East German art history journal *Bildende Kunst* (Fine art).

While international cultural exchanges were recognized as a means to reduce international tension as well as to glean useful models for selective imi-

10 I. Gerchuk, "Iskusstvo 'ottepeli' v poiskakh stilia," *Tvorchestvo* 6 (1991): 28.

tation, they were nevertheless tolerated only "on condition that, under cover of such exchanges, no alien or hostile ideas are smuggled into the country."[11] The easing of international relations and the expansion of transnational cultural dialogue were accompanied, as Gerchuk indicates, by intense internal ideological vigilance to counterbalance the increased access to information about foreign ideas, lifestyles and art. The party newspaper *Pravda* warned: "the warmer the international relations the more acute the ideological battle; there is no contradiction here."[12]

The mechanisms for exchange and encounter were controlled by the official bureaucracies (the Ministry of Culture, VOKs, and the cultural unions, etc.) and opportunities for person-to-person contacts with foreign artists and critics, though growing, were closely controlled in the 1950s and mostly limited to bigwigs. Although international tourism within and across the Iron Curtain developed in the decade after Stalin's death, still only a handful of the most privileged artists traveled abroad, usually as part of a delegation. Even travel to "fraternal countries" and contacts within the Bloc were suspiciously guarded, leaving little room for spontaneous connections to be forged. Ideas from Central and Eastern Europe, where social and intellectual revolts had been endemic since Stalin's death and where Stalinist aesthetics had never taken deep root, were potentially as corrosive as those from the capitalist world. Soviet reformers, however, sought them hungrily, as a potentially fruitful source of rejuvenation for Soviet art. For those who did have the opportunity, travel abroad left a profound impression, for example, on the young Moscow painter Pavel Nikonov, who went to Prague in 1956 as a reward for a prize-winning diploma painting.[13]

The most immediate and large-scale impact—and the hardest for the authorities to control—was exercised by events that took place on Soviet soil, primarily in Moscow. To begin to characterize more precisely the nature and mechanisms of these influences we shall focus on two key events that took place in the year following Khrushchev's secret speech, 1956–57: the Picasso

11 G. Zhukov in *Mezhdunarodnaia zhizn'* (November 1959); Alexander Werth, *Russia under Khrushchev* (Greenwich, CT: Fawcett, 1975), 231.

12 David Zaslavskii, in *Pravda* (7 November 1959); cited in Werth, *Russia under Khrushchev*, 229. The party demonstrated the limits of its tolerance by branding Nobel Prize–winning writer Boris Pasternak a traitor for his novel *Doctor Zhivago* in Autumn 1958.

13 Pavel Nikonov, interviews, Moscow, 1989 and 1992.

retrospective of 1956; and the Sixth World Festival of Youth and Students in 1957. The unprecedented exhibition *Art of Socialist Countries*, which opened at the end of 1958, was also of signal importance, but for lack of space here the viewer is referred to my earlier publication on the subject.[14] These events were pivotal in introducing foreign contemporary art to the Soviet audience. While playing a major role in the internationalization of professional art practice and criticism, they also helped to expand the horizons of the lay public, the "Soviet people," whom official rhetoric invoked as the ultimate arbiter of art under socialism. They challenged the vaunted homogeneity of the Soviet art world, its single "method" of socialist realism, its hegemonic model of what the art of socialism should be like, and its claim to lead the socialist world.[15] The challenge was all the more trenchant when it came from close to home: from within the Bloc or from fellow socialists. The art of other socialist countries and "progressive artists," I shall argue, muddied the divide and raised the specter of the uncoupling of socialism and realism. In face of insistence on the irreconcilability of the two Cold War camps and their supposedly antithetical cultures of realism and modernism, any such erosion of difference between the art of socialism and of capitalism threatened, from the conservative point of view, the integrity of socialist realism. From a reformist or modernizer perspective, however, the encounter with alternative models created an opportunity to assimilate and to legitimate a broader "modern" and international realism, one capacious enough to accommodate formal devices banned hitherto because of their identification with modernism. A "contemporary style" was put forward, as we shall discuss. It lends itself to description in mongrel terms that would be anathema to conservatives, as a "modern realism" or "socialist modernism." As Rupnik argued "Eastern European change has often acted as a bridge for Western influences on the Soviet system."[16] The influence of modernism was mediated in part through Central and Eastern Europe and other aligned countries as well as nonaligned

14 Reid, "The Exhibition *Art of Socialist Countries*." On other significant events that lie beyond our scope here, see Susan E. Reid, "Who Will Beat Whom? Soviet Popular Reception of the American National Exhibition in Moscow, 1959," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 9:4 (Fall 2008): 855–904; Susan E. Reid, "The Soviet Pavilion at Brussels '58: Convergence, Conversion, critical Assimilation, or Transculturation?" *Cold War International History Project* Working Paper no. 62 (December 2010).

15 Zhilina, *Kul'turnaia zhizn'*, 302–305; Gerchuk, "Iskusstvo 'ottepeli'. 1954–1964," 79.

16 Rupnik, "Soviet Adaptation to Change," 260.

socialists. From the Soviet conservatives' point of view, Eastern Europe, far from playing its assigned role of insulator or buffer against malign Western influences, acted rather as a conductor and mediator of modernism.[17]

Even before Khrushchev's momentous reassessment of the recent, Stalinist past in his 1956 Secret Speech, art historians and curators embarked on a reevaluation of foreign influence in Russian and Soviet culture. A period of intensive reacquaintance with international art of several centuries, and also with aspects of Russia's own suppressed artistic heritage, began in 1954. The USSR Ministry of Culture (established in 1953 to take over the responsibilities of the Stalinist Arts Committee), began to organize exhibitions of West European art on the basis of Soviet collections, suddenly exposing the Soviet public to contemporary and historical foreign culture.[18] The Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts reopened in 1954 as a museum of European art. The display began with ancient Egypt and ended with the stark, politically engaged work of German artist Käthe Kollwitz. It included a French section that traced the development of "realism" from the French Revolution to Millet and Courbet but which also included, for the first time, a display of impressionist paintings by Renoir, Monet, and Degas, exhumed from storage where they had languished since the closure of the State Museum of Modern Western Art (GMNZI).[19] The tentative rehabilitation of impressionism continued with a major exhibition of "French Art from the Fifteenth to the Twentieth Century" from Soviet collections. This opened at the Pushkin Museum in November 1955 then moved to the Ermitazh in Leningrad in 1956.[20]

The treatment of impressionism revealed splits in the cultural establishment along the scale from reformist/liberal to conservative/Stalinist/nationalist in which art history—or "tradition and innovation: as it was thematized in contemporary discourse—became a battleground. These splits would become wider and more visible in the course of the Thaw. The official attitude toward impressionism remained ambivalent or hostile; while early impressionism began to be assimilated to the realist canon, conservatives still drew

17 On the "contemporary style," see Reid, "The Soviet 'Contemporary Style,'" 71–12; Reid, "Toward a New (Socialist) Realism," 217–39.

18 K. Sitnik, "Vysokie traditsii (Zametki o vystavke frantsuzskogo iskusstva)," *Iskusstvo* 3 (1956): 40; and A. Pavlov, "Novaia ekspozitsiia Muzeia izobrazitel'nogo iskusstva imeni A.S. Pushkina," *Iskusstvo* 3 (1954): 76.

19 Pavlov, "Novaia ekspozitsiia," 71; See Reid, "Toward a New (Socialist) Realism," 217–39.

20 Sitnik, "Vysokie traditsii," 40.

a line at the later work, maintaining that it had declined into formalist preoccupations, subjectivism, willful distortion, and "the cult of accidental, fleeting perceptions."[21] Beyond early impressionism, French art was still officially formalist and subjectivist. This applied to some of the most vital influences on early-twentieth-century Russian art such as Paul Cézanne, on the grounds that: "The transformation of a human being into an object of still life, so characteristic of Cézanne, was the beginning of the end of art."[22] There was an important difference in approach, however. No longer must everything ideologically and artistically suspect be kept behind seven seals in order to protect the public's innocence and quarantine pure Russian art from contamination. In the last rooms of the exhibition viewers were exposed to works by artists long labeled formalists: Cézanne, Gauguin, Matisse, and early Picasso. The Ermitazh also paid special tribute to Cézanne by organizing an exhibition of his work for the fiftieth anniversary of his death in 1956.[23]

The significance of exhibitions of Cézanne and impressionism for members of the older generation of Soviet artists cannot be overestimated. Many had continued, if tacitly, to regard this as their true bloodline, the great source of modern world art, of which they believed Soviet art to be a part.[24] Younger artists, however, were often more interested in finding out about twentieth-century traditions, both foreign and indigenous, including the Russian avant-garde. Those seeking to uncover the suppressed history of Russian modernism were occasionally able to see still forbidden work by Malevich, Tatlin, Kandinsky, Chagall, and others in the cellars of the Ermitazh in Leningrad and the State Tret'iakov Gallery in Moscow if brave curators were prepared to risk their jobs to conduct them into the museums' underworld. Art historian Antonina Izergina received resounding applause for daring to utter in public the names of Malevich, Filonov, and Kuznetsov, and even suggesting that some of their work

21 Ibid., 52; A. G. Barskaia, *Putevoditel' po vystavke "Iskusstvo Frantsii XV-XX vv."* (Leningrad: Gos. Ermitazh, 1955), 92; Pavlov, "Novaia ekspozitsiia," 76; N. Iavorskaia, "Problema impressionisma," in *N. V. Iavorskaia. Iz istorii sovetskogo iskusstvoznaniia. O frantsuzskom iskusstve XIX-XX vekov*, ed. N. N. Dubovitskaia (Moscow: Sovetskii khudozhnik, 1987), 78; "Traditsii i novatorstvo," *Iskusstvo* 2 (1956): 21.

22 "Traditsii i novatorstvo," 21.

23 RGANI, f. 5, op. 36, d. 47, l. 108.

24 Rosalind Blakesley and Susan E. Reid, "A Long Engagement: Russian Art and the 'West,'" and Alison Hilton, "Holiday on the Kolkhoz: Socialist Realism's Dialogue with Impressionism," both in *Russian Art and the West: A Century of Dialogue in Painting, Architecture and the Decorative Arts*, ed. Rosalind P. Blakesley and Susan E. Reid (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2007), 3–20; 195–217.

was "infinitely more realistic than we sometimes see today." Not everyone welcomed the more liberal line, however. For many, such work remained beyond the pale. To defend it aroused the anger and consternation of conservatives in the art establishment such as Vladimir Serov (soon to become president of the new Russian Federation branch of the Artists' Union formed at the end of the decade) who maintained the thoroughbred Russian purity of realism. Such utterances as Izergina's, Serov warned, reduced realism to a kind of "Noah's ark for seven pairs of clean and one pair of unclean [species]."[25]

While for conservatives, twentieth-century Western art remained the decadent, formalist "other" of healthy Soviet realism and any attempt at syncretic assimilation of its influence was seen as pernicious, even those on the liberal end of the art establishment during the Thaw could still not tolerate abstract art.[26] Abstraction allegedly epitomized the "antihuman" character of capitalist culture, demonstrated international capitalism's will to impose a uniform blankness on cultural production throughout the world, and effaced national specificity, turning art into a common currency, identical and exchangeable, like money. However the party and state authorities no longer considered total quarantine a viable method of countering its influence given the Soviet Union's new global position.

Just months after Khrushchev had denounced Stalin's excesses, one of the most momentous artistic events of the Thaw took place. A major retrospective of Pablo Picasso, "the most famous communist in the world after Stalin and Mao Tse-Tung,"[27] opened at the Pushkin Museum on 26 October 1956 then moved to the Ermitazh in Leningrad from 1 to 19 December. Organized by the All-Union Society for Cultural Links with Abroad (VOKS) in honor of the artist's seventy-fifth birthday, it was the initiative of Ilya Ehrenburg. The writer had established strong contacts with the Parisian avant-garde in the 1910s and 1920s and continued to act as a cultural ambassador during the Stalin period, although he was regarded with suspicion as a conduit of pernicious foreign influence.[28] Under Khrushchev he took an active

25 RGANI, f. 5, op. 17, d. 498, l. 97.

26 While the different positions are presented here a binary of extremes, in fact it was a sliding scale and individual positions were fluid, contingent upon particular situations.

27 Sarah Wilson, "From Monuments to Fast Cars: Aspects of Cold War Art, 1946–1957," in *Cold War Modern: Design 1945–1970*, ed. David Crowley and Jane Pavitt (London: V & A, 2008), 29.

28 RGANI, f. 5, op. 17, d. 498, ll. 97–98.

role in promoting acceptance of modern Western art in the Soviet Union and breaking down the chauvinism of the cultural Iron Curtain.[29]

The fact that Picasso was a card-carrying communist—and in 1950 had even received the Lenin Peace Prize for his 1949 dove poster[30]—made this exhibition possible. Moreover it was not hidden away in some marginal space where only a few specialists might see it, but displayed in the USSR's most prestigious central museums of Western art, which enshrined the classical art and European Old Masters, the approved world heritage on whose shoulders Soviet culture was suppose to stand. But as a cultural representative of communism, Picasso presented a paradox that challenged the Cold War binaries.[31] For here, in one person, a commitment to the struggle against capitalism was combined with avant-garde aesthetics, which the Soviet epistemological order assigned unambiguously to capitalism. This was definitely not realism as the Soviet authorities or public knew it; his was the kind of work that in the Soviet Union would be denounced for formalism, antihumanist deformation, and the defamation of the image of man. It was not art that could satisfy the social command according to the socialist realist criterion of "*narodnost'*," to be "understood and loved by the people." How could a communist artist paint in this "antihuman," subjective, and incomprehensible way?

Whatever doubts there might be about its *narodnost'*, the Picasso exhibition attracted large crowds. In retrospect it took on almost mythic importance as an event that encapsulated the spirit of the Thaw. In the late 1970s, a mere reference to the Picasso exhibition was enough to trigger a generation's shared nostalgia for the 1950s and for the *Sturm und Drang* of their own youth, as in Viktor Slavkin's popular 1979 play *Vzroslaia doch' molodogo cheloveka* (The adult daughter of a young man).[32] It was seminal not only

29 Il'ia Erenburg, "Mysli pod novyi god," *Ogonek* 1, 1 January 1959, 9–10; Igor' Golomshtok and Andrei Siniavskii, *Pikasso* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1960); Joshua Rubenstein, "Ilya Ehrenburg—Between East and West," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 4:1 (2002): 44–65; Reid, "Toward a New (Socialist) Realism," 221–24; see also Eleonory Gilburd, "Picasso in Thaw Culture," *Cahiers du monde russe* 47:1–2 (2006): 65–108.

30 Picasso joined the French Communist Party before the end of the war and participated in the First International Peace Congress in Wroclaw and the Second World Peace Conference in Warsaw, at the end of 1950. Wilson, "From Monuments to Fast Cars," 29.

31 As Sarah Wilson notes, "the mobilization of Cold War intellectuals required transportable and reproducible art works plus film and souvenirs." Ibid., 29.

32 Reprinted in V. Slavkin, *Pamiatnik neizvestnomu stiliage* (Moscow: Artist, rezhisser, teatr, 1996); A. I. Morozov, "Sovetskoe iskusstvo 60-kh godov i opyt 'novogo realizma,'" *Sovetskoe iskusstvoznanie* 25 (1989), 41; Mikhail German, *Slozhnoe proshedshee* (St. Petersburg: Iskusstvo Spb, 2000), 395.

for the chance it offered to study hitherto forbidden examples of modernist art, but because it provided a forum for lively, spontaneous public discussion of contemporary culture, as Vladimir Slepian, a young Moscow art student, later recalled:

> Every day at the exhibition I met outstanding writers, musicians, scientists, actors, and painters. But the most numerous spectators were young people, who, excited by the discovery of a personal and revolutionary art, filled the hall from morning till evening. Right there, in the halls, discussions were held on such subjects as aesthetics, trends in painting, and the status of Soviet art.[33]

In addition to the impromptu discussions that arose in the lines and before the paintings, students organized unofficial debates in a number of higher education institutions. These not only discussed Picasso and modern art in general; they even raised such politically dangerous topics as "the artist's creative freedom."[34] The effects of the exhibition on the Moscow and Leningrad public, far exceeding those of a narrowly artistic event, alarmed the Central Committee. Its Culture Department reported, when the exhibition moved to Leningrad, that viewers, especially students, were taking an "uncritical attitude" to the formalist works shown in the exhibition, declaring Picasso to be the pinnacle of contemporary world art, while denigrating Soviet art and the method of socialist realism.[35]

Two attempts were made to hold an informal public debate on Arts Square in Leningrad, the second of which, on 21 December, was broken up and the instigators arrested. "Party organs conducted the necessary work with them," the Central Committee report noted ominously. Not to be deterred, some of the students then appear to have gate-crashed the Leningrad Artists' Union where artists and members of the public were gathered to discuss the Union's routine exhibition. The students praised the "formalist" work of Picasso, saying that only people of high artistic culture could appreciate it and that it was because such people were few in the Soviet Union the work of Picasso was

33 Vladimir Slepian, "The Young vs. the Old," *Problems of Communism* (May 1962): 56–57.
34 Ibid., 57.
35 RGANI, f. 5, op. 36, d. 27, ll. 102–5.

deemed inaccessible.[36] Respected art historian Mikhail Alpatov declared in the reformist literary newspaper *Literaturnaia gazeta* that everyone had a civic duty to know the work of Picasso, calling it the greatest phenomenon of the present day, which reflected the strivings of the twentieth century.[37]

The public response to the Picasso show, and the twitchiness of the authorities, have to be understood in the context of the volatile atmosphere of late 1956 after the Secret Speech, which was pervaded by uncertainties concerning the effects and limits of reform, and by a sense that, for better or for worse, anything could happen. The artistic communities of Moscow and Leningrad were suspected as hotbeds of revanchism. A three-day discussion on "The Future of Soviet Art," held in Leningrad in December 1956, while the Picasso exhibition was under way, gave further worrying evidence of this "politically unhealthy mood." One speaker condemned collectivization (whose legitimacy Khrushchev's secret speech had carefully left unchallenged, predating Stalin's "excesses") as a national tragedy and spoke of the regime as the "socialist monarchy," even comparing it unfavorably to the British monarchy: it suppressed the people's sense of beauty and truth whereas the latter existed to educate this sense. Art historian Moisei Kagan also questioned the legitimacy of the USSR Academy of Arts, founded in 1947, calling it a revival of a feudal institution.[38]

The response to Picasso set alarm bells ringing about the emergence of "alien, antiparty" views.[39] For those eager for liberalization, on the other hand, it was almost an equivalent in cultural terms to the momentous Secret Speech earlier that year. Anxieties concerning the effects of Khrushchev's speech and of cultural liberalization in the Soviet Union ran high in the autumn of 1956, and were exacerbated by the uprisings in Poland and Hungary. The impact of the Picasso exhibition, and its mythical status in memories of the Thaw, may be due in part to the coincidence that it opened the day after news was released in the Soviet press about the political crisis in Hungary. The hopes of a cultural breakthrough in Soviet cultural policy, which the exhibition symbolized, contrasted poignantly with the threat that the events

36 Ibid., l. 103.

37 RGANI, f. 5, op. 36, d. 47, l. 108.

38 RGANI, f. 5, op. 36, d. 25, ll. 110–12.

39 RGANI, f. 5, op. 36, d. 27, ll. 102–5; Igor Golomshtok, "Unofficial Art in the Soviet Union," in *Soviet Art in Exile*, ed. Igor Golomshtok and Alexander Glezer (New York: Random House, 1977), 89.

in Eastern Europe would result in renewed isolation from the West.[40] For the CPSU held the ideological revisionism of the Polish and Hungarian intelligentsia responsible for the 1956 uprisings in those countries.

The Soviet authorities had reason to fear the influence of Central and Eastern European cultural as well as political developments on the Soviet intelligentsia.[41] Revisionist Marxist philosophy and economic thought flourished. And, since Stalinist socialist realism had only been imposed in the "fraternal countries" after the war, prewar avant-garde tendencies such as abstraction, constructivism and colorism were quick to revive, especially in Poland, while new trends influenced by surrealism, existentialism, and Art Informel established themselves from 1956.[42]

Young people were considered the most susceptible to the blandishments of Western culture.[43] Conservatives stereotyped young people who took an interest in modernist art as affected, work-shy youth, who considered themselves above the interests of the ordinary Soviet Russian people. Thus they tarred them with the same brush as the *stiliagi*, the youth counterculture that emerged in the postwar period, which emulated Western dress and dance styles, and which was anathematized in public discourse in terms of decadence and contagious disease, criminality, and anti-Soviet inclinations.[44] Today, such thinking went, they slavishly imitate Western styles; tomorrow they will betray their country.[45] The problem of young artists and viewers—

40 Rubenstein "Ilya Ehrenburg," 61; German, *Slozhnoe*, 287–88.

41 RGANI f. 5, op. 36, d. 47, l. 178.

42 See Piotr Piotrowski, "Modernism and Totalitarianism: The Thaw and Informal Painting in Central Europe, 1955–1965," in *Artium Quaestiones* (Poznan: Adam Mickiewicz University Press, 2002), vol. X; and Piotr Piotrowski, "Modernism and Socialist Culture: Polish Art in the Late 1950s," in *Style and Socialism: Modernity and Material Culture in Post-War Eastern Europe*, ed. Susan E. Reid and David Crowley (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 133–48.

43 E. Iu Zubkova, *Obshchestvo i reformy, 1945–1964* (Moscow: Rossiia molodaia, 1993), 154–55.

44 For example, I. Gorin, "Zhivopis,' skul'ptura i grafika na stranitsakh zhurnala 'Iunost','" *Iskusstvo* 8 (1962): 74; "Ob usilenii politicheskoi raboty" (December 1956), cited in Zubkova, *Obshchestvo i reformy*, 154–55.

45 RGANI, f. 5, op. 36, d. 47, l. 108; Russian State Archive of Literature and Art (Rossiskiy Gosudartsveiy Arkhiv Literatury i Iskusstva, RGALI), f. 2329, op. 4, ed. khr. 1000, ll. 33–36; Gorin, "Zhivopis'," 72–74. On *stiliagi*, see Zubkova, *Obshchestvo i reformy*, 138, 150; Mark Edele, "Strange Young Men in Stalin's Moscow: The Birth and Life of the *Stiliagi*, 1945–1953," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 50:1 (2002): 37–61. A poem by Evgenii Evtushenko, "Stiliaga" (1960), characterized the *stiliaga* of its title in terms of his artistic preference for the modernist West rather than realist Russia: the young man rejects Aleksandr Gerasimov, the epitome of Stalinist socialist realism, and worships Picasso. Evtushenko may have had in mind an actual confrontation when Gerasimov, the arch-enemy of "formalism," was publicly humiliated at a soirée in honor of Picasso. See Slepian, "The Young vs. the Old," 55–57.

the emerging generational conflict that threatened to split apart the mythical unity of the Soviet artistic "family"—was seen as a ticking bomb.[46]

Yet the urge to batten down the hatches once more against pernicious foreign influences—and especially those likely to corrupt youth—was in tension with Moscow's aspiration to cultural as well as political leadership of the socialist world. Both in domestic cultural policy and in relation to the threat of foreign culture, a new approach was adopted toward maintaining loyalty, based on competition and carefully contextualized exposure.[47] In spite of the cultural and political retrenchment that followed the Polish and Hungarian uprisings—and the return to brutal means of suppression especially in regard to the latter—international cultural diplomacy continued to expand under the new policy of peaceful coexistence and competition with the West. At the very time when the forces of retrenchment appeared to have the upper hand, in late July and early August 1957, an event of signal importance for de-Stalinization in artistic and popular culture, the Sixth World Festival of Youth and Students, took place in Moscow.

Biennial World Festivals of Youth and Students were a Cold War institution begun in 1947 to resuscitate the project of the defunct Communist Youth International and rally the youth of the world behind the banner of international socialism.[48] The majority of the foreign delegations attending the festival came from socialist or postcolonial countries, or represented left-wing, "progressive" groups from capitalist countries. Yet, whatever its intended role as an instrument of the Cold War and expansion or consolidation of the socialist camp, the 1957 festival had an irreversible impact on the society and culture of its Soviet host and was a turning point in Soviet acquaintance with the breadth of contemporary world culture. Temporarily transforming Moscow into a lively, cosmopolitan city after years of cultural isolation, the

46 Russian State Archive of Social and Political History (Rossiskiy Gosudartsveiy Arkhiv Sotsialno-Politicheskoi Istorii, RGASPI), f. M-1, op. 4, d. 871, l. 203–6; RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 32, d. 797, ll. 1–15; RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 32, d. 829; RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 32, d. 972, ll. 54–55; RGANI, f. 5, op. 36, d. 47, ll. 43, 83, 133; RGANI, f. 5, op. 37, d. 70, ll. 23–24, 74–77; RGANI, f. 5, op. 37, d. 23, l. 22; RGANI, f. 5, op. 37, d. 84, ll. 66–69.

47 TsAOPIM (Moscow Central Archive of Social and Political History) f. 4, op. 139, d. 54 (Protokol soveshchaniia sekretar zemliachestv inostrannykh studentov, March 1962).

48 Erwin Bresslein, *Drushba! Freundschaft? Von der kommunistischen Jugendinternational zu den Weltjugendfestspielen* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1973); Kristin Roth-Ey, "Propaganda, Sex, and the 1957 Youth Festival," in *Women in the Khrushchev Era*, ed. M. Ilic, S. E. Reid, and L. Attwood (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 75–95.

sudden influx of large numbers of young people from all over the world, with their unfamiliar and diverse dress styles and relatively unconstrained behavior, changed forever the horizon of aspirations of Soviet young people. The event was remarkable for "the very spirit of free communication, the universal loosening of inhibitions."[49] Khrushchev's son-in-law, Aleksei Adzhubei, went so far as to say that it signaled the emergence of an open society.[50] Gerchuk recalls, "These two bright, summer weeks gave us a sense of the interconnectedness of contemporary world culture and the possibility of fruitful, creative dialogue with young artists of various countries."[51] Artists later associated with the nonconformist or underground art world, Vladimir Nemukhin and Iurii Sobolev, likewise recalled the festival as the moment of revelation, when they first discovered a sense of commonality with foreigners and their art, which they had been taught to regard as inimical.[52]

The festival included two art exhibitions, organized jointly by the USSR Artists' Union and the Ministry of Culture: an *All-Union Youth Exhibition*, representing young artists from throughout the Soviet Union[53] and an *International Exhibition of Fine and Applied Art*, held in Gorky Park from 30 July to 20 August 1957.[54] Following on three years of intensive acquaintance with long-suppressed or neglected aspects of Western and Russian art, the *International Exhibition* presented young Soviet artists with an exhilarating, if indigestible, mélange of contemporary tendencies from around the world, including, Italian neorealists, East German expressionists, surrealism (from Japan), Art Informel, action panting, and geometric abstraction (from Iceland).[55] It occasioned heated debate between the Soviet hosts and their foreign guests concerning the relative merits of realism and abstraction, but also breached the boundaries of realism. If realism and socialism were to remain coupled, in opposition to Western modernism, then realism itself had to be unbound, liberated from dogma, and internationalized.

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49 *"Drugoe iskusstvo"*, vol. 1, 38.
50 Aleksei Adzhubei. *Te desiat' let* (Moscow: Sovetskaia Rossiia, 1989), 119.
51 Gerchuk, "Iskusstvo 'ottepeli'. 1954–1964," 77–78.
52 Golomshtok, "Unofficial Art," 89.
53 Archive of the USSR Artists' Union Directorate, Moscow, op. 2, d. 2218.
54 *Mezhdunarodnaia vystavka izobrazitel'nogo i prikladnogo iskusstva. Katalog* (Moscow: VI Vsemirnyi festival' molodezhi i studentov, 1957).
55 Gerchuk, "Iskusstvo 'ottepeli' v poiskakh stilia," 27.

One of the most important innovations of the festival was an international art studio, set up on the initiative of the Komsomol organization of the Moscow Artists' Union in Gorky Park. There, artists from fifty-two countries could work together and share ideas.[56] An informal and uncensored rotating exhibition of studies and drawings produced in the studio was hung on its walls.[57] The very idea of such a spontaneous and unvetted display was radical in Soviet terms. So was the informality and intimacy of the contact with foreigners. Here, Soviet artists could watch, talk with, and even work alongside the international guests, studying their methods and exchanging ideas. Participants included representatives of neorealist, expressionist and abstract tendencies from all around the world. Although the US State Department officially disapproved of American participation in the festival, regarding it as a communist propaganda exercise, contemporary American modernism was represented by a minor action painter, Harry Colman, who attended unofficially.[58] Colman gave a lecture on contemporary North American art, illustrated with color reproductions of de Kooning and Pollock, and gave a public demonstration of action painting.[59] At a discussion after his performance, Colman's unabashedly modernist view of art as self-expression collided with the Soviet credo—which, in face of the threat of abstraction, united reformist and conservative members of his audience—that art's primary purpose was social cognition. "The main thing for the artist is to express his essence," Colman asserted provocatively. "Realism has grown old, the art of the future is abstraction!"[60]

While the official Soviet view of abstraction remained irreconcilably hostile, some Soviet artists agreed with Colman.[61] Until 1957, even the most au-

56 "Rabota s molodymi khudozhnikami," *Moskovskii khudozhnik* 3, 15 July 1957, 2.

57 E. Aleksandrova, "Mezhdunarodnaia izostudia na shestom vsemirnom festivale molodezhi i studentov," *Moskovskii khudozhnik* 3, 15 July 1957.

58 A. Frankfurter, "Art and Artists under Communism Today," *Artnews* (April 1958): 25; Christine Lindey, *Art in the Cold War* (London: The Herbert Press, 1990), 207, n14.

59 S. Donskaia, "V mezhdunarodnoi studii khudozhnikov," *Moskovskii khudozhnik* 4, 15 August 1957, 2.

60 Ibid.; Harry L. Colman, "An American Action Painter Invades Moscow," *Artnews* 12 (1958): 33, 56–57.

61 V. Zimenko, "Abstractionism Is Fruitless," *Sovetskaia kul'tura*, 24 August 1957; translated in *Current Digest of the Soviet Press* (*CDSP*) 9:32 (1957); P. Sokolov-Skalia, "Molodye khudozhniki," *Vecherniaia Moskva*, 5 August 1957; A. Kamenskii, "Razmyshleniia na festival'noi vystavke," *Moskovskii khudozhnik*, 30 August 1957, 3; V. Dement'ev, "Searchings, Hopes and Bewilderments," *Komsomol'skaia Pravda*, 21 August 1957, 3 (translated in *CDSP* 9:32 [1957]); Louis Aragon, "Une exposition de jeunes à Moscou," *Les Lettres Francaises*, 11 July 1957, 1, 6–7.

dacious artists had rarely ventured beyond a mildly expressionist or post-impressionist figuration. But the broad exposure to contemporary Western developments at the World Festival of Youth and Students, combined with occasional, still mostly illicit, opportunities to see examples of suppressed Russian nonobjective art from the 1910s and 1920s, spurred some more radical Soviet artists to abandon recognizable figuration in their work from late 1957.[62] What nonconformist artist Anatolii Zhigalov has called the "development of contemporary Western art on Russian soil," which, at the end of the Khrushchev period, would be consolidated as a parallel or underground art world, began here at the World Festival of Youth and Students.[63] Some were drawn to the modernist conception of art as individual self-expression, or to the surrealist idea of liberating the irrational depths of the individual psyche—precisely those aspects vilified in official responses to contemporary abstract art.[64] Having watched Colman create his gestural painting, Anatolii Zverev, a young painter who had been expelled from art college, adopted a kind of automatic painting using spontaneous brushstrokes, frenzied scratching and unmixed squirts of paint straight from the tube.[65] At the Festival Studio in Gorky Park, Zverev produced a drip painting in one hour before an audience of admiring foreigners. The international jury, chaired by David Siqueiros, awarded him a gold medal for this work.[66]

Many artists who subsequently became associated with the artistic underground recall the festival as a founding experience.[67] For others, such as painter Pavel Nikonov and critic Aleksandr Kamenskii, who subsequently became movers and shakers in the reformist wing of the official art world, the festival was as formative as it was for more radical dissenters. But they drew different

62 Lidia Masterkova, Ol'ga Potapova, Anatolii Zverev, Lev Kropivnitskii, and Aleksandr Bandzeladze turned to abstraction after the International Exhibition. *"Drugoe iskusstvo"*, vol. 1, 33, 39, 43, 54; Bandzeladze, interviews, Tbilisi 1989, 1991.

63 A. Zhigalov, "Izmeneniia v khudozhestvennom soznanii na neofitsial'noi stene 1970-kh godov," in *Khudozhestvennaia zhizn' Rossii 1970-kh godov kak sistemnoe tseloe*, ed. N. M. Zorkaia (St. Petersburg: Aleteiia, 2001), 209.

64 S. Mozhniagun, "Estetika abstraktsionizma porochna," *Iskusstvo* 9 (1958): 13–18; V. Prokof'ev, "Chto takoe siurrealizm?" *Tvorchestvo* 7 (1959): 23–24; I. Golomshtok, "'Otkrytie tashizma,'" *Tvorchestvo* 9 (1959): 23–24.

65 Golomshtok, "Unofficial Art," 89.

66 Oskar Rabin also received an award. Valentin Vorob'ev, "Zapovednyi treugol'nik sovarta," in *Miagkii znak*, ed. Tolstyi (Paris: Viverism, 1989), 118; *"Drugoe iskusstvo"*, vol. 1, 38; Gerchuk, "Iskusstvo 'ottepeli'. 1954–1964," 78.

67 See *"Drugoe iskusstvo"*.

lessons from it. Their attention was gripped not by abstraction or surrealism but by modern, expressive forms of realism they found in the work of Mexican, Belgian, and other artists.[68] A recent graduate from the Moscow Surikov Art Institute, Nikonov's eyes had already been opened by his recent visit to Prague, where he encountered, for the first time, the work of the prerevolutionary Russian avant-garde in private collections. He later recalled his response to the range of foreign tendencies at the festival's *International Exhibition*: "In the West art was quite different. In our section everything was dead, some kind of tortured academicism. It had to be done differently. But how?"[69]

Nikonov's 1956 diploma piece, *October*, was included in the Soviet section of the International Exhibition and was awarded a silver medal. It was an austere painting that attempted to strip away the clichés from the representation of the Revolution. In place of large, choreographed crowds, narrative action and demonstrative gesture, the stock-in-trade of Stalinist representations of the revolution, the painting aimed for maximum dramatic intensity through minimum means. A sense of pent-up energy and apprehension was conveyed largely through the contrast of light and shade and the silhouettes of the groups of figures, which betrayed Nikonov's interest in the work of Aleksandr Deyneka, specifically the latter's 1928 painting about the Civil War, *The Defense of Petrograd*. Deyneka, an associate of the cosmopolitan, postcubist, and expressionist Society of Easel Painters (OST) in the 1920s, had only recently emerged from under the pall of "formalism," but rapidly became a paragon of "contemporaneity" for young artists.

The more avant-garde, abstract, or surrealist work shown at the festival did not offer a viable answer to Nikonov's question, how to breathe new life into Soviet art. Along with other young artists and critics associated with the reformist "left wing" of the Moscow Artists' Union, Nikonov sought a figurative but emotionally intense form of painting with a public, civic purpose. How to inject realist painting with renewed power to speak persuasively to contemporary publics in the service of socialism/class struggle? The values of socialism still remained inseparable from realism, but the formal language

68 Kamenskii, "Razmyshleniia na festival'noi vystavke," 3.

69 Pavel Nikonov, "Nemnogo o sebe," in *Pavel Nikonov*, ed. E. Murina (Moscow: Sovetskii khudozhnik, 1990), 69; A. Dekhtiar', *Pavel Nikonov* (Leningrad: Khudozhnik RSFSR, 1981), 11; Nikonov, interview, Moscow, 1992. Ernst Neizvestny was awarded a bronze for his *Torso*: Archives of the USSR Artists' Union Directorate, op. 2, d. 2233 (consulted 1989).

and parameters of "realism" were now open to reassessment. As art historian German Nedoshivin put it, "Where is the new realistic form?"[70]

Answers to Nedoshivin's and Nikonov's question had already begun to appear both in words and in practice. At the festival, an ecumenical definition of realism was put forward by Mexican graphic artist Arturo Garcia Bustos, speaking at a two-day public debate. Mexican artists, he declared, see

> art as a means of communication between peoples, taking on whatever form the artist considers the most clear and eloquent. Such is our understanding of realism, but this realism of ours is suffused with passion, it participates in the struggle and is not a simple mirror. Our realism, reflecting life, includes the artist's individual interpretation of its phenomena.[71]

This broad conception of realism would have struck a chord with many a young idealistic Soviet artist. Foreign interpretations of realism displayed at the Moscow festival departed significantly from the Soviet canon with its nineteenth-century Russian models. They presented an engaged, passionate, and popularly accessible art in which the human figure remained central, but where meticulous verisimilitude, naturalistic detail, etc., were no longer mandatory. Many works used expressionist devices such as deformation, hyperbole and spatial distortions, vigorous, "expressive" brush marks, stark tonal contrasts, or deliberately crude line, and, contrary to the norms of socialist realism, had a somber, critical, even pessimistic tone. This was exemplified by the contemporary Mexican mural artists and printmakers, the work of Italian neorealists, and the Belgian realist Roger Somville. Somville, whom Serge Fauchereau, in his essay for this book, calls "the only true European heir of Mexican muralism" was awarded a gold medal at the festival for his *Miner from Borinage*, a painting which particularly aroused Nikonov's interest.[72] An outspoken champion of realism in his art and writing, Somville was committed to a new public art celebrating people's labor, struggles, and suffering as well as their joys, exposing the realities of the class struggle continuing in the present day. He called for realist art to be dynamic in its method and

70 RGALI, f. 2465, op. 1, d. 75, ll. 11, 14.
71 Vadim Polevoi, "Khudozhnik i zhizn'," *Iskusstvo* 6 (1957): 21.
72 Dekhtiar', *Pavel Nikonov*, 11–12.

style; it must constantly break new ground and avoid ossifying into comfortable clichés.[73] Messages of this sort, proselytized at the festival, found a ready audience among young Soviet artists who were still committed to a socialist, public art, trying to reform and regenerate Soviet realism from within. Other "progressive artists"—the term used for politically sympathetic residents of capitalist, nonaligned, or postcolonial states—including West European communist party members such as Picasso—were also influential, including the French artists Fernand Léger (whose work would be shown in Moscow in 1963) and André Fougeron.[74]

Contemporary Polish posters shown at the festival were another important revelation for those, like Nikonov, seeking to "do realism differently." As characterized by a Polish delegate, the posters demonstrated "the artist's great emotional engagement, trying to create images that can capture the viewer, lapidary and laconic form, humanism of content."[75] It was this quality of compressed emotionality that the young sculptor Ernst Neizvestny had in mind when he concluded a speech at the conference by calling for "the realism of Whitman and Mayakovsky, for a realism that 'can fire people's hearts with a single syllable.'"[76] The World Festival of Youth and Students demonstrated the diversity of contemporary forms of realism, suggesting that, within the bounds of the modern public's comprehension, a range of styles was possible.[77] The young critic Kamenskii urged tolerance toward the foreign art shown there, for "we cannot enter another monastery with our own code of practice."[78]

In the international socialist context, the term "realism" began to be used almost interchangeably with a new term, the "art of humanism." This corresponded to the "socialist humanism" which the socialist world camp claimed as the sign of its moral superiority over capitalism. The term "humanism" appears to have been appropriated from Western revisionist Marxist discourse, perhaps in order to harness a potentially dangerous concept. In the thought of Roger Garaudy, humanism implied a syncretic reconciliation of Marxist

73 Roger Somville, *Hop là! Les pompiers les revoilà* (Brussels: Editions du Cercle d'éducation populaire, 1975), 17.
74 Andrei Fuzheron, "My za realizm," *Sovetskaia kul'tura*, 16 November 1961, 4.
75 Polevoi, "Khudozhnik i zhizn'," 27.
76 Ibid., 33.
77 Morozov, "Sovetskoe iskusstvo," 42–43.
78 Kamenskii, "Razmyshleniia na festival'noi vystavke," 3.

and Christian approaches to the problem of man in contemporary society.[79] In the debate at the festival, realism—reconstituted as the "art of humanism"—emerged as a kind of united front, a socialist international style of modernity to set against that other international style, the "antihuman" art of modernism. International modernism acted as the cultural arm of imperialism, denying human experience, suppressing national specificity, and imposing abstraction's "cosmopolitan uniformity"; realism, by contrast, placed "man" at the center and was the guarantor of national cultural autonomy and diversity. In the context of "peaceful competition," the international role to which the Soviet Union aspired made it necessary to adopt an ecumenical approach to realism.[80] If it was to present itself as the patron of national self-determination movements and recruit voluntary adherents from within the postcolonial world, it had to counter capitalist propaganda's accusations and demonstratively reassure its potential allies that it would respect their autonomy and national diversity.

But just as Garaudy's revisionist conception of humanism entailed a synthesis of two antithetical ways of comprehending the world, Christianity and Marxism, so, too, the new realism required at least partial reconciliation with its antithesis—modernism. It proposed the legitimacy (or at least "critical assimilation"), in socialist art, of formal, expressive devices that, in Stalin-era discourse and practice, had become inseparably identified with modernism. As Nedoshivin argued, to reject all stylization and expressive deformation as departures from realism, as conservatives did, was to impoverish socialist realism, and make far too generous a gift to the capitalism by leaving modernism in full possession of all these expressive means.[81] Was this erosion of the defining antithesis "realism versus modernism" under the influence of international developments in realism—a historically legitimate, indeed dialectical process, or did it smell of convergence?

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79 Garaudy put forward a generalized humanism in his *Humanisme marxiste* (1957) and *Perspectives de l'homme*. Michael Kelly, *Modern French Marxism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982).

80 This approach was adopted at the Moscow exhibition *Art of Twelve Socialist Countries*, late December 1958. See Iu Kolpinskii, "Edinstvo sosialisticheskogo metoda i mnogoobrazie natsional'nykh form," *Sovetskaia kul'tura*, 15 January 1959; Iu Kolpinskii, "Khudozhniki dvenadtsati stran," *Iskusstvo* 6 (1959): 14; Reid, "The Exhibition *Art of Socialist Countries*," 101–32.

81 G. Nedoshivin, "'Oshibochnaia kontseptsiia,'" *Tvorchestvo* 5 (1959): 14–15.

The expression of contemporaneity had become, once again, as in the 1920s, an internationalist project, defined, as novelist Iurii Nagibin declared in 1960, as much by Pablo Picasso and Diego Rivera as by any Russian artist.[82] Some saw the artistic events as an opportunity to consolidate a world movement of "democratic" realism—or the "art of humanism" as Soviet ideologues began to call it.[83] Others such as Nedoshivin spoke of an international revolutionary art.[84] This new internationalism required loosening the narrow doctrinaire canon of socialist realism and embracing an ecumenical approach to style, form, and medium. It implied recognition that realism was culturally contingent and historically mutable, and that different forms were needed for different geographical contexts, social conditions, and cultural traditions. The new, unbound conception of realism could even be stretched to embrace art that drew on non-European traditions of representation, such as contemporary Chinese art in the Goxua tradition, an exhibition of which was held in 1957 at the Pushkin Museum.[85] Picasso, in spite of his radical departures from verisimilitude, had been shown (if not widely accepted) because he was classed as a communist or "progressive" artist, and certain works such his *Massacre in Korea* could even be recuperated as "critical realist."[86] However, his inclusion presented a major challenge to the norms and integrity of Soviet realism. Other politically sympathetic foreign ("progressive") artists also began to be exhibited in Moscow, despite misgivings concerning the challenge they would present to Soviet norms, and aroused great interest among young Soviet artists. A number of exhibitions of Mexican artists, including Diego Rivera, David Siqueiros, and José Orozco, were held between 1955 and 1963.[87]

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82 Iurri Nagibin, "Chto sovremenno?" *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 3 December 1960.

83 Kamenskii, "Razmyshleniia na festival'noi vystavke," 3; Polevoi, "Khudozhnik i zhizn'," 16–34.

84 Morozov, "Sovetskoe iskusstvo"; Nedoshivin subsequently elaborated an inclusive conception of an international "revolutionary style." G. Nedoshivin, "Teoreticheskie problemy sovremennogo izobrazitel'nogo iskusstva" (Moscow, 1972), 123–24. A comparable "revolutionary tradition" is represented by Richard Hiepe, *Die Kunst der neuen Klasse* (Vienna: C. Bertelsmann Verlag, 1973), published in Russian as Rikhard Khipe, *Iskusstvo novogo klassa* (Moscow: Progress, 1978); and in English as Richard Hiepe, *Art of the New Class* (Moscow: Progress, 1978).

85 RGALI, fond 2943, op. 1, ed. khr. 916 (stenographer's report of meeting of Moscow artists with Chinese artists, 29 April 1957).

86 Picasso's *Guernica* and *Massacre in Korea* 1951 became—in reproduction—a catalyst for discussion on both sides of the Iron Curtain in the early 1950s. Wilson, "From Monuments to Fast Cars," 29.

87 D. Shmarinov, "Vystavka meksikanskoi graviury," and Diego Rivera, "Sovremennaia meksikanskaia zhivopis'," both in *Iskusstvo* 5 (1955): 59–65; RGALI, f. 2329, op. 4, ed. khr. 697; A. Kamenskii, "Vysokoe iskusstvo surovoi pravdy," *Moskovskii khudozhnik* 15, 15 August 1958, 6; Morozov, "Sovetskoe iskusstvo," 50–51.

They exercised a vital influence on Soviet printmaking and stimulated the revival of monumental art in the late 1950s, in combination with the example of Fernand Léger.[88]

For reformist Soviet artists, one of the most fruitful encounters in the 1950s was with the "progressive artists" of contemporary Italy, the postwar critical realists Renato Guttuso, Gabriele Mucchi, Ernesto Treccani, Armando Pizzinato, Ugo Attardi, and others. Soviet public acquaintance with the Italian "neorealist" painters (as they were known in the Soviet Union by analogy with the eponymous movement in film) had begun in 1954. Although not universally accepted, neorealist painting was legitimated as an antifascist movement dedicated to the critical exposure of the social injustices of postwar capitalism.[89] These artists were characterized by attention to the harsh reality of ordinary working people's daily lives and cultivation of the appearance of unembellished truth, their terse, undemonstrative, working-class heroes, expressive but unbeautiful brushstroke, their use of expressionist devices such as unfamiliar angles of vision and exaggerated, even grotesque depiction, and their rejection of narrative. All this exercised a significant influence on the development of a new Soviet realism during the Thaw.[90]

Guttuso and Mucchi exemplified the potential of expressive deformation to provide the formal means for a trenchant new realism. Modernist concerns and devices which had been indiscriminately condemned for "formalism," "subjectivism," and "deformation" since the 1930s began to be recuperated under the sign of "contemporaneity." Expressionism had been excommunicated from socialist realism along with other formalist manifestations of bourgeois ideology. Georg Lukács had fatally discredited it in his essay "The Rise and Fall of Expressionism," written in the year socialist realism was ratified, 1934, where he closely identified expressionism's primitivist anti-intellectualism with the ideology of National Socialism. Since the war, however,

88 The American communist Rockwell Kent was also exhibited at the Pushkin Museum from December 1957 through February 1958. Kent visited Moscow several times, donated a collection of his work to the Soviet people in 1960, and in 1962 was made an honorary member of the USSR Academy of Arts. Zhilina, *Kul'turnaia zhizn'*, 287, 441, 496; *Iskusstvo* 1 (1958): 79; Rokuell Kent, "Zhivotvornaia sila realizma," *Tvorchesto* 11 (1958): 11; German, *Slozhnoe proshedshee*, 327–28; V. Turova, "Pogressivnoe amerikanskoe iskusstvo," *Tvorchestvo* 1 (1960): 9–12.

89 E. L. Khersonskaia, "Progressivnye khudozhniki sovremennoi Italii," *Iskusstvo* 5 (1954); E. L. Khersonskaia, "Novye tendentsii v razvitii neorealizma v ital'ianskom iskusstve," *Iskusstvo* 8 (1956): 53–60.

90 Morozov, "Sovetskoe iskusstvo," 39–63.

artists and art historians in East Germany had succeeded in cleansing expressionism of this association with fascism, selectively rehabilitating the historical movement, recuperating those elements that could constitute a useable heritage for the socialist Germany, and making its formal devices available for development in contemporary practice.[91]

In October 1956 the East German art journal *Bildende Kunst* published an important polemic by Wolfgang Hütt on "Realism and Modernity" which foreshadowed and may have directly influenced Soviet reformist discussions. Hütt proposed that modern industrial society had transformed human consciousness as a result of which a new artistic form was required.[92] He distinguished between "modernity in art" (defined as a correspondence to contemporary experience, a defining principle of realism), and "modern art" or modernism (which, he claimed, was no longer modern but regressive). But he proposed that the question of the "heritage" had been treated too narrowly and that the baby had been thrown out with the modernist bath water. Artistic modernity was not only a matter of theme but also of *form*. In search for an artistic language that expressed the spirit of contemporaneity—that is, socialist modernity—artists should appropriate the positive aspects of modernism. These included the language of expressionism, which, he reminded the reader, had served as the medium for a socially critical art in the earlier twentieth century.[93]

Although conservatives still vigorously opposed it, the legacy of expressionism also began to receive a more insightful and selectively favorable treatment in the Soviet Union, a process in which the developments in East Germany were clearly influential. In summer 1958, an exhibition of German expressionist works on paper from the 1920s and 1930s (presumably sent by the German Democratic Republic to cement cultural relations), was held at the prestigious USSR Academy of Arts. The work of Otto Dix, George Grosz, Lea Grundig, Hans Grundig, Max Beckmann, and Käthe Kollwitz shown there substantiated Soviet reformers' growing conviction that expres-

91 David Elliott, "Expressionism: A Health Warning," in *Expressionism Reassessed*, ed. Shulamith Behr et al. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), 44–45.

92 Wolfgang Hütt, "Realismus und Modernität. Impulsive Gedanken über ein notwendiges Thema," *Bildende Kunst* 10 (1956): 565; and compare Martin Damus, *Malerei der DDR: Funktionen der bildenden Kunst im Realen Sozialismus* (Hamburg: Rowohlts enzyklopädie, 1991), 142.

93 Hütt, "Realismus und Modernität," 565–67.

sive formal devices associated with modernism could serve the expression of a "socialist humanism" and help to rejuvenate realism. A crucial rhetorical distinction was drawn between "left" or progressive expressionism—critical of capitalism and militantly opposed to fascism—and reactionary expressionism. Soviet critic Igor' Golomshtok reviewed the German exhibition in terms that pointed up its relevance for contemporary developments in Soviet art. The work of Kollwitz and Lea Grundig, employed, he wrote, a passionate language of distorted forms and stylized (*uslovnye*) compositions, synthetic, emotional images and broad, social generalizations that demanded the viewer's active perception. "Generalized, laconic, and intense," it was, in short, "genuinely contemporary in style."[94] The work of those politically engaged artists substantiated reformers' belief that expressive, nonnaturalistic formal devices associated with modernism were not inevitably the vehicle of bourgeois ideology, as Stalinists still objected, but could also serve the expression of contemporary "socialist humanism."[95]

The possibility of a fruitful convergence of realism and modernism (although couched in more politically astute terms) became a matter of vigorous debate in the Soviet art establishment during 1958, when, for the first time since the 1920s, it became possible to begin to come to terms with the experience of modernization, which the country had undergone since 1917.[96] Between 1958 and 1962 reformists artists and critics debated the nature of contemporaneity, arguing, like Hütt, that rapid progress and the advance of world communism effected corresponding transformations in human consciousness, which must in turn be reflected by the renewal, indeed modernization—of the language of art if it was adequately to correspond to contemporary experience. New times demanded new forms.

In summer 1958 aesthetician Nina Dmitrieva launched the discussion in the Soviet press with a manifesto announcing the advent of the "contempo-

94 The German artists "achieved enormous aesthetic expressiveness thanks to the generalization of artistic form, the *uslovnost'*, and sometimes the direct deformation of visual images (and not in spite of them as it has sometimes been customary to say here)." I. Golomshtok, "Vystavka nemetskoi grafiki," *Moskovskii khudozhnik* 14, 30 July 1958. A conference on expressionism was held in the Institute of Art History, 6–10 October 1961: RGALI, f. 2465, op. 1, ed. khr. 391, 392. An exhibition of photomontages by John Heartfield was also held in 1958 (*Pravda*, 6 July 1958); Zhilina, *Kul'turnaia zhizn'*, 315.

95 N. Dmitrieva, "K voprosu o sovremennom stile v zhivopisi," *Tvorchestvo* 6 (1958): 10.

96 Compare Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 222.

rary style" (*sovremennyi stil'*). As she described it, this was a modern period style embracing all aspects of visual culture. Its hallmarks were "synthesis, laconicism, and expression."[97] Emphasizing formal innovation and specifically pictorial means of expression, her conception of a modern form of realism was inspired by the Brechtian synthesis of modernism and realism of the 1920s and 1930s, the heyday of international communism. Dmitrieva's formulation of the contemporary style bore much affinity to—and may have been directly influenced by—the East German discussion on "Realism and Modernity" in 1956.[98] Dmitrieva argued that rapid progress and the advance of world communism would effect corresponding transformations in human consciousness which must, in turn be reflected by *stylistic* change, if it was adequately to express the *experience* of modernity (contemporaneity). While maintaining the emphasis on art's relation to reality, this gave greater weight to subjective experience of that reality. It implied, like Hütt, that technological modernity had engendered a new kind of consciousness that required a new, more stylized and explicitly artificial (*uslovnyi*) language to embody it.[99] Rejecting verisimilitude as the chief criterion of realism in favor of a broader correspondence to contemporary vision, nonnaturalistic devices, and conventions, Dmitrieva and other reformist critics and artists sought to recuperate the example of early modernism, indiscriminately condemned for "formalism," "subjectivism," and "deformation" since the 1930s.[100] Its hallmarks were defined as synthesis, generalization, laconicism, expression, and monumentality.[101] Detail was to be reduced, narrative compressed, and emotion to be

97 Dmitrieva, "K voprosu," 9–12. The debate on the contemporary style produced a literature too extensive to list fully. Some responses were published in *Tvorchestvo*, 1958, nos. 6–12; and 1959, nos. 5, 10; including editorials, "Cherty sovremennogo stilia," *Tvorchestvo* 10 (1958): 8; and "Zerkalo epokhi. K diskussii o stile," *Tvorchestvo* 12 (1959): 9–11. See also B. Vipper, "Neskol'ko tezisov k probleme stilia," *Tvorchestvo* 9 (1962): 11–12; and Gerchuk, "Iskusstvo 'ottepeli'. 1954–1964," 56. Contributions to the ensuing debate were translated and published in journals in the fraternal countries: "Zerkalo epokhi," 9. For more detail see: Susan E. Reid, "De-Stalinization and the Remodernization of Soviet Art: The Search for a Contemporary Realism, 1953–1963" (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1996).

98 Hütt, "Realismus und Modernität," 565; Damus, *Malerei der DDR*, 142.

99 Aleksei A. Gastev, "Dvizhenie k stiliu," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 16 July 1960; Protocol of the Meeting of the Bureau of Criticism Section of the Moscow Section of the Artists' Union, 8 April 1959, to discuss a paper by A. Gastev, "Sotsialisticheskii realizm i uslovnost' v monumental'noi zhivopisi," RGALI, fond 2943, op. 1. ed. khr. 2990; V. Turbin, *Tovarishch vremia i tovarishch iskusstvo* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1961); G. Nisskii, "Poiski formy," *Moskovskii komsomolets*, 9 April 1960, 4.

100 Dmitrieva, "K voprosu," 9; L. Bubnova, "V poiskakh ostrogo sovremennogo vyrazheniia," *Moskovskii khudozhnik* 15, 15 August 1958, 2; Gastev, "Dvizhenie k stil'iu."

101 Dmitrieva, "K voprosu," 9.

conveyed by specifically pictorial means in order to engage the modern viewer in an immediate, visual way, rather than through the pedantic illustration of a narrative for which Stalinist art was now anathematized. "It is no longer enough to *show* the viewer something," Dmitrieva wrote. "It is necessary to arouse him to *think* about the great social problems of contemporaneity, but . . . the path to thought lies through the emotions." It was a "realism of a new type—one might say, a militant realism, which speaks in the name of the people."[102]

Dmitrieva had in mind the work of young artists, such as Nikonov and his colleague Nikolai Andronov, who were increasingly audaciously rejecting the monopoly that a simplified and distorted "Russian tradition" had come to hold over the definition of realism. The Russian Realist School was no longer the—or even *a*—model for contemporary socialist art, according to young critic Liudmilla Bubnova. Reviewing an exhibition of young artists, including Nikonov and his colleague Nikolai Andronov, in 1958, Bubnova consigned this model of realism to history: "The calm, narrative character of the art of the *Peredvizhniki*, on which our artists have, in the main, based themselves, can no longer fully satisfy the young. . . . [It] is valuable for its high civic ideas, but its themes and its pictorial language . . . are the themes and language of the nineteenth century."[103] The young Moscow artists, on whose work Bubnova based her conclusions, engaged in defining a new, expressive form of realism, a "contemporary style" suitable to Soviet people's experience of modernization, urbanization, and social upheaval.[104]

As the Soviet Union under Khrushchev abandoned "socialism in one country" to reclaim leadership of the international socialist movement, reformist aestheticians presented the development of a "contemporary style"—the new style of socialist modernity—as an international project, of concern to all socialist artists, not only Soviet. "In attempting to define a "socialist style," wrote Nedoshivin, "it is necessary to examine the shared features of realism in the twentieth century, not only Soviet art." In face of accusations of willing the convergence between realism and modernism and, by extension, between socialism and capitalism, it was surely quite legitimate, they argued,

102 Dmitrieva, "K voprosu," 9.
103 Bubnova, "V poiskakh ostrogo sovremennogo vyrazheniia."
104 See Reid, "De-Stalinization and the Remodernization of Soviet Art."

for the new international, socialist style to draw on an ecumenical range of twentieth-century, figurative models, foreign as well as Russian.[105] What mattered was not the choice of formal devices but the content or worldview they were used to express. Thus the new global position of the Soviet Union and exposure to international contact not only inspired but were used by reformers to promote their agenda and to legitimate the liberation of the forms of realist painting from the bounds of dogma and national tradition.

105 G. Nedoshivin, "40 let sovetskogo iskusstva," *Tvorchestvo* 11 (1957): 6; and Nedoshivin "'Oshibochnaia kontsepsiia'," 14.

22

"Friendly Atmospheres"? The Union Internationale des Architectes between East and West in the 1950s

Alexandra Köhring

The relationships between Eastern and Western architects after the Second World War have long been understood as a "battle of styles."[1] This description of a battle refers, above all, to the rivalry between competing systems as manifested in the buildings in East and West Berlin. The investigation of an alternative East–West dialogue on architecture and urban design is only in its early stages.[2] Today, ways of approaching Cold War culture and the *Nachkriegsmoderne* (postwar modernity) have developed that allow one to reexamine East–West relations in architecture: in the global context of urban development, construction in the postwar period is seen less as the renaissance of a functional, international style and more as a heterogeneous phenomenon.[3] The "making of" certain buildings and their iconic status as examples

1 Catherine Cooke and Susan E. Reid, "Modernity and Realism: Architectural Relations in the Cold War," in *Russian Art and the West: A Century of Dialogue in Painting, Architecture, and the Decorative Arts*, ed. Rosalind P. Blakesley and Susan E. Reid (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2007), 172–94; Greg Castillo, "Socialist Realism and Built Nationalism in the Cold War 'Battle of the Styles,'" *Centropa* 2 (2001): 84–93.

2 David Crowley, "Paris or Moscow? Warsaw Architects and the Image of the Modern City in the 1950s," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 4 (2008): 769–98.

3 David Crowley and Susan E. Reid, eds., *Socialist Spaces: Sites of Everyday Life in the Eastern Bloc* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2002).

of liberal-democratic architecture is receiving greater attention.[4] In addition, recently, the concept of the Iron Curtain has been replaced with that of a porous "Nylon Curtain": nylon is used to indicate not only that the curtain was transparent and permeable, but also that modern consumption functioned as an element of transnational competition. Goods, materials, and technologies created a "global" yardstick:

> The curtain was made of Nylon, not Iron. It . . . yielded to strong osmotic tendencies that were globalising knowledge across the systemic divide about culture, goods and services. These tendencies were not only fuelling consumer desires and expectations of living standards but they also promoted in both directions the spreading of visions of "good society," of "humanism," as well as of civil, political, and social citizenship.[5]

Architecture, too, can be included in this competition because buildings also displayed technologies and materials to great effect.

In the 1950s, architects from the Soviet Union and Western European countries came in closer contact than at any point since the famous meetings of the Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (International Congresses of Modern Architecture, CIAM) in the 1920s and 1930s.[6] The socioeconomic problems of society after the war and the reconstruction of cities presented architects in the East and the West with the same problems. Both responded to housing shortages and the problem of undeveloped or inadequate urban infrastructures with large-scale projects: spatial planning concentrated both on the division of cities into quarters as a progressive form of socialization and on the planning of leisure and green spaces; discussions on the creation of satellite towns were renewed.[7] The rationalization of construction methods, which was already widely established in Soviet housing con-

4 Henry Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson, *The International Style* (New York: 1932); Panayotis Tournikiotis, *The Historiography of Modern Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999); Jean-Yves Andrieux and Fabienne Chevallier, eds., *The Reception of Architecture of the Modern Movement: Image, Usage, Heritage* (Saint-Etienne: Publications de l'université de Saint-Etienne, 2005).

5 Györgi Peteri, "Nylon Curtain—Transnational and Transsystemic Tendencies in the Cultural Life of State-Socialist Russia and East-Central Europe," *Slavonica* 2 (2004): 113–23.

6 Eric Mumford, "CIAM and the Communist Bloc, 1928–59," *The Journal of Architecture* 2 (2009): 237–54.

7 Werner Durth, ed., *Träume in Trümmern: Planungen zum Wiederaufbau zerstörter Städte im Westen Deutschlands, 1940–1950* (Braunschweig: Vieweg, 1988).

struction before Nikita Khrushchev's call for cost cutting in building, also created a common denominator in the approaches adopted by architecture and urban planning in the East and the West.

The desire to belong to an international elite was also strong among Soviet architects: as early as 1945, they had depicted their work and tasks after the war as an international matter. The first meeting in 1945 of Moscow's Council of Architects, which had been formulating general aesthetic principles since the 1930s, called for a development of cultural relationships via travel: "Actors travel, sportsmen travel. . . . We have to place the questions [of building] on the basis of that which we see."[8] "Seeing" something was, however, not easy for the architects because organizing exchanges, not to speak of travel, under the supervision of the Soviet administration was bureaucratic and protracted.[9] In general, the All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (VOKS) oversaw foreign contacts in the realm of culture, as well as journeys to and from abroad. VOKS drew up the itineraries for foreign visitors and provided guides and interpreters. VOKS had to receive the approval of the party for its activities. On the Western European side, fraternal associations were set up by famous individuals with a soft spot for Russia or the Soviet Union, for example the Society of Cultural Relations with the USSR[10] based in London and the France-USSR Society in Paris. An important interface for foreign contacts was the Union Internationale des Architectes (UIA) founded in 1948. The UIA sought to define professional architects as a transnational elite that crossed state boundaries.[11] The Soviet Union belonged to the founding members of the association. Nikolai Baranov,

8 CAGM, f. 534, op. 1, d. 59, l. 115.

9 The exchange in architecture was divided organizationally into two spheres. Both architects and civil engineers traveled. In 1955, such journeys took civil engineers to thirty-two European cities and to the United States. Their goal was to view the "assembly and use of reinforced concrete constructions, the production of new building materials and components, scientific research in the area of construction" and the "project planning and construction of residential buildings, schools, hospitals and businesses." In addition, Soviet engineers took part in the first and second congresses of the International Association for Reinforced Concrete in 1954 in Dresden and in 1955 in Amsterdam. The groups provided a comprehensive report to the architects' association with a large number of statistics (Russian State Archive of Literature and Art [Rossiskiy Gosudartsveiy Arkhiv Literatury i Iskusstva, RGALI], f.674, op. 3, d. 1356). In the four years from 1952 to 1955, thirty-four architects from "capitalist countries" traveled to the Soviet Union (Great Britain, FDR and Brazil). From the Soviet Union, thirty-four architects traveled to the West (RGALI, f. 674, op. 3, d. 1325).

10 Today the Society for Co-operation in Russian and Soviet Studies (www.scrss.org.uk).

11 Nicolas Aymone, *L'apogée des concours internationaux d'architecture: L'action de l'UIA 1948–1975* (Paris: Picard, 2007); Pierre Vago, *L'UIA, 1948–1998* (Paris: Epure, 1998); International Union of Architects website, www.uia-architectes.org.

who at that time held the post of the main architect in Leningrad, was, alongside Paul Vischer from Switzerland and the American Ralph Walker, one of three vice presidents of the UIA. Exchanges with the UIA were organized by the international department of the Soviet society of architects together with the party and VOKS. The architectural encounter between East and West in the 1950s was therefore closely connected to cultural diplomacy, foreign policy, and international communism. The travel and organization of guest lecturers took place above all against the background of attempts—motivated by politics and ideology—by both sides to assert their superiority and get the measure of the other.[12]

This article deals with the exchanges between Eastern and Western architects and urban planners via the UIA, above all those taking place in the context of the Fifth Congress on the "Construction and Reconstruction of Towns," organized in 1958 in Moscow. In the various personal and press reports of the congress, there is unanimous talk of a "friendly atmosphere" in the encounter between architects and urban planners from East and West. How did this atmosphere come about? Which contentious issues were brushed over in order to present architecture and urban planning in the 1950s as an area of "friendly" activity? The following will explore the opportunities and means for communication within the sphere of architecture and urban planning that crossed ideological boundaries, as well as the moments in which divergent ways of seeing were expressed.

The UIA's founding general meeting in Lausanne in 1948 named the body's goals as the organization of conferences in order to promote international cooperation among architects regardless of racial, religious, or political and ideological boundaries. Thus, the UIA pursued the ideal of peaceful cooperation following the examples of the UN and UNESCO. From this starting position, architects should take up their "new tasks"—the elimination of housing shortages and large-scale urban construction projects. The named goals were compatible with the "peace mission" connected to the program of international socialism, which had guided Soviet foreign policy, above all in Soviet international cultural policy, since the 1950s.[13]

12 Michael David-Fox, "Origins of the Stalinist Superiority Complex: Western Intellectuals Inside the USSR, 1920s-1930s," National Council for East Eurasian and East European Research (NCEEER) working paper, 2004.

13 Eleonory Gilburd, "Cultural Exchange and Universalist Thinking in the Soviet Union of the 1950s," paper delivered at the Harvard Annual Graduate Student Conference, International History, 2006, http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~conih/abstracts/gilburd.htm.

The central networker of the body was Pierre Vago, the general secretary of the UIA, who had already cultivated contacts with the Soviet Union in the 1930s as a participant in the "Réunion internationale d'architectes" in Moscow in 1932.[14] The exchange within the UIA was limited to certain groups: the only people to travel within the framework of the UIA were the elites responsible for planning, who also occupied important positions in the architects' association, the academy or the departments of urban planning.

An important stage of cooperation was the Fifth Congress on the "Construction and Reconstruction of Towns" that was organized in 1958 in Moscow. The congress had three subthemes: first, the project planning and reconstruction of new cities; second, the norms and guidelines for an urban construction that saw itself as an international assignment; and, third, the technologies and creative aspects of the industrialization of architecture.[15] The speeches were organized by region, which produced the following geographical blocks: Eastern Europe and Eastern Asia, i.e., the "People's Democracies" (Bulgaria, Hungary, China, North Korea, Poland, Romania, the USSR, and Yugoslavia), Western Europe (Austria, Germany, Denmark, the Netherlands, Great Britain, Switzerland, Sweden, and other Western European countries) and the United States and Canada.

The congress ended with a communiqué that confirmed the division of cities into quarters (*mikroraion*) and the employment of plans for land use that could be promoted by centralized administrative structures. It raised the problem of monotony produced by a standardized architecture. Although there were controversies at the conference on the aesthetics of construction and the aesthetic expression of ideologies,[16] the summing-up underlined common principles: it presented flexible building methods and the new variety of materials as offering new opportunities for aesthetic expression, which could remove the impression of monumentalism even in large-scale projects. In the Soviet press, the closing speech was presented as a confirmation of Soviet leadership: "The discussion shows convincingly the leading position of the socialist countries in the development of contemporary urban construc-

14 Pierre Vago, *Une vie intense* (Paris: AAM, 2000).

15 "V Mezhdunarodnom Soiuze Arkhitektorov," *Arkhitektura SSSR* 1 (1958): 62–63; "V kongresse Mezhdunarodnogo Soiuza Arkhitektorov," *Arkhitektura SSSR* 8 (1958): 3–6.

16 "Za dal'neishii pod'em gradostroitel'stva," *Arkhitektura SSSR* 10 (1958): 1–5.

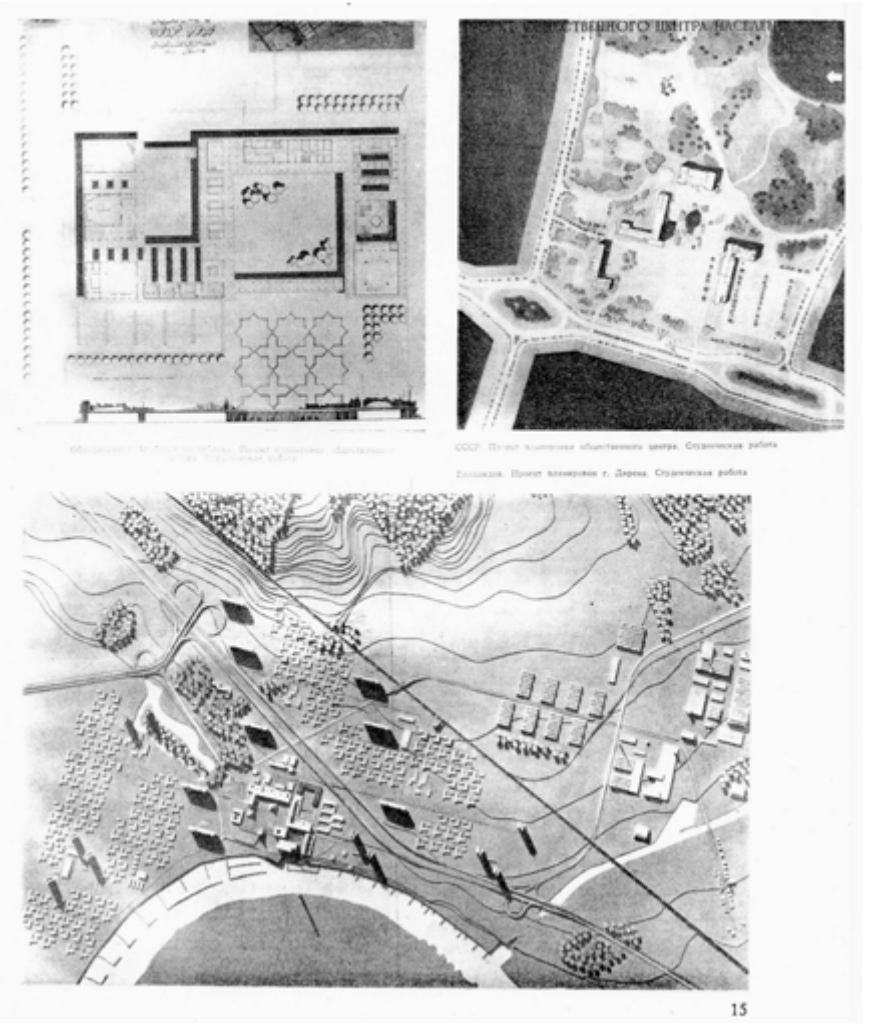

Figure 22.1.
"Students works. Town planning", in *Mezhdunarodnye vystavki po gradostroitel'stvu, Arkhitektura SSSR,* no. 9, 1958, 15.

tion and the serious problems that private property presents for the development and reconstruction of cities in the capitalist countries."[17]

However, there were numerous platforms during the congress where architecture and urban planning could be debated and different visual mate-

17 "Reshenie V kongressa Mezhdunarodnogo Soiuza Arkhitektorov," *Arkhitektura SSSR* 8 (1958): 7.

rial displayed: alongside the lectures, there were several accompanying exhibitions and various publications. The large exhibition was organized into different national exhibitions: alongside models and aerial photographs of new construction projects, plans for land use were presented. The schematic depiction, in particular, which implied a visually "neutral," analytical view of architecture and urban planning, portrayed the building projects as parallel and comparable developments.[18] Photographic documentation of individual buildings was practically lost amid the concentration on urban planning. The Soviet Union, however, also presented a special exhibition of the prize-winning design for the Palace of Soviets and the Lenin monument. These were, on the whole, elaborate architectural drawings, some of which were painted in watercolors. Although the building project of the Palace of Soviets had already been discontinued, this exhibition displayed again the practice of design that had determined Soviet architecture and urban planning well into the postwar period. The "Council of Architects" (Arkhitekturnyi sovet) in Moscow's department for urban planning had repeatedly discussed such grand vistas.[19]

Architectural photography also employed different methods of visualizing construction. Alongside the congress catalog, there was a Soviet publication—*Novye goroda SSSR* (New cities of the USSR). Its goal was to present "outstanding architectural monuments" and it mainly depicted the central sites around impressive state buildings. The congress catalog, which was published in Russian and English under the title *Construction and Reconstruction of Towns*, was based on a uniform questionnaire that had been passed on to the various national committees.

Therefore, the various methods of depiction with which the architectural developments were presented at the congress moved between the attempt to find a common standardized "language" for the development of cities and the need—as in the case of the individual Soviet presentations—to express specifics. This is connected to the question of how far the techniques of design and presentation employed by the various educational institutions or plan-

18 "Mezhdunarodnye vystavki po gradostroitel'stvu," *Arkhitektura SSSR* 9 (1958).

19 Peter Noever and Boris Groys, eds., *Tyrannei des Schönen. Architektur der Stalin-Zeit* (München: Prestel, 1994); N. Polyakov, "Proektirovanie arkhitekurnykh ansamblei Moskvy," *Arkhitektura i stroitel'stvo Moskvy* 2 (1953): 5–14.

ning organs determined in advance the views of the architects and planners from the East and West.[20]

Outside the official lecture program, there were also further talks in smaller groups. At the end of the congress, Pierre Vago gave a paper to the Soviet association of architects on "What I Saw in Moscow and Leningrad,"[21] in which he tried to summarize his experiences and observations from the journey to Moscow: looking back, Vago claimed to have gone in search of the legacy of the modern building movement of the 1920s and 1930s. With this in mind, Vago gave a withering assessment of Soviet building style: "One must concede that contemporary buildings provoke little more than a smile than that they could be of interest for foreign architects." The old Russian architecture had provoked a positive response in him, while the wooden construction of the simple residential buildings had also left "nice" impressions. The creation of green space, which he referred to in several sections, also received praise: the planning of green spaces could be a guiding principle for the organization of space and proportion in urban planning. When Vago referred to the rationalized building methods, he praised the high level of technology, but criticized the fact that production methods and design were separate: the prefabricated concrete parts seemed massive and heavy, above all due to the insufficient work done to the surface.[22] Vago himself referred to the fact that particular ways of seeing related to material aesthetics had already become entrenched: "Can it be that we see the things differently?"[23]

Vago took from his journey the fundamental insight into the "human factor," that is, the general impression of Russian humanity, also evident in Russian literature. Vago's report and his assessments were extremely nuanced; his opinions on Soviet buildings did not merge from a comparison of systems, but rather his stylistic classification was based on a nuanced knowledge of the historical development and the "national character" of building methods.[24] His evaluation of the sense of space and urban green spaces, in contrast, was

20 Daniel Gethmann and Susanne Hauser, eds., *Kulturtechnik Entwerfen. Praktiken, Konzepte und Medien in Architektur und Design Science* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2009).

21 RGALI, f. 674, d. 1475. P.Vago, "Ob arkhitekture Moskvy", 1958.

22 Monika Wagner, "Berlin Urban Spaces as Social Surfaces: Machine Aesthetics and Surface Texture," *Representations* 102 (2008): 53–75.

23 RGALI, f. 674, d. 1475. P.Vago, "Ob arkhitekture Moskvy", 1958.

24 Lauren M. O'Connell, "A Rational, National Architecture: Viollet-Le-Duc's Modest Proposal for Russia," *JSAH* 52 (1993): 436–52.

based on the general principles of large-scale urban planning. Interestingly, the greatest differences in the perception of architecture were in reference to material design.

Pierre Vago was a member of the editorial board of the glossy architectural journal *L'architecture d'aujourd'hui*. The reports on the development of construction in the Soviet Union published in *L'architecture d'aujourd'hui* in the 1950s seem to be one-sided: it reported even more on the historical legacy in architecture, the old Russian and ecclesiastical architecture, than on the large, new construction sites (in the southwest, for example, which the Soviet delegation presented at the UIA's 1955 Congress on "Architecture and the Evolutions of Building" in The Hague). In 1956, a report on building in the southwest under the title "Moscou et les cathédrales"[25] firmly placed urban construction in the old Russian tradition of monumental architecture. In 1957, there followed a longer report on "Moscou: Son histoire, son évolution," which traced the path of development from the old Russian architecture to the new monumental constructions and their furnishings.[26] The development of construction methods and technologies was presented from the point of view of historical evolution, i.e., as a national narrative. The illustrations for the article "Moscou: Urbanisme, architecture et techniques de construction" were designed to suggest that the new industrialized construction methods actually included the artisan techniques of wood construction.[27] In 1958, there was little reporting on the congress. The main topic was the International World Fair in Brussels, in which the Soviet pavilion received a brief mention, although the monumental and imposing elements of using space were emphasized more than modern construction.

Alongside the lectures, there were also informal discussions; these conversations with "important" individuals, above all with diplomats, but also architects, took place on the fringes of the official program and were recorded by the VOKS guides.

One example of such informal encounters is the report on discussions with Arthur Ling from England. Ling had headed the reconstruction of Coventry and was a member of the Architects' and Planners' Group of the Soci-

25 *L'architecture d'aujourd'hui* 66 (1956): 98–99.
26 *L'architecture d'aujourd'hui* 70 (1957): 26–31.
27 *L'architecture d'aujourd'hui* 74 (1957): 27.

PAR MICHEL BEDETTI, INGÉNIEUR E. T. P.

URBANISME. — Moscou, dont la population atteint aujourd'hui près de cinq millions d'habitants, s'est lentement développée depuis le XIIe siècle autour du Kremlin. Au XVIe siècle, la ville avait largement débordé les remparts et une muraille, sensiblement circulaire, fut édifiée, déterminant ainsi une surface de quatre kilomètres environ de diamètre. Les voies de circulation radiale rayonnaient dans toutes les directions.

Les urbanistes contemporains se sont attachés à maintenir le Kremlin comme centre effectif et psychologique de la ville. Deux des grandes artères actuelles suivent un tracé circulaire ayant comme centre le Kremlin et pour rayons respectifs deux et trois kilomètres environ. Les artères radiales, au nombre de dix, convergent dans cette direction.

Le plan directeur de Moscou date de 1935. Ainsi basé sur le principe circulaire radial, il intéresse une surface d'environ 45 km de diamètre. Moscou comptait alors seulement quelques immeubles d'habitation en briques, la plus grande partie de la population étant logée dans de petites maisons en bois, les « isba » pour la plupart délabrées.

Le plan de Moscou apporta de nombreuses modifications dont les grandes lignes peuvent être considérées : Percement ou élargissement des artères sur les tracés étudiés en épargnant les bâtiments valables quitte à les déplacer. — Construction d'immeubles à l'emplacement de groupes d'isba, mis en place de façon progressive. On voit d'ailleurs, à Moscou, des îlots ainsi condamnés, entourés de policlinques ; ces îlots seront résorbés peu à peu. — Construction d'immeubles aussi dans les zones d'extension de la ville ouvrant sur la campagne. La périphérie de Moscou présente à ce sujet de grandes possibilités. — Espaces verts : De nombreux parcs seront aménagés sur de vastes espaces réservés à l'intérieur même de la ville et des zones de verdure sont prévues autour des blocs nouvellement construits. Ce plan d'urbanisme rigide fera de Moscou une ville moderne ; mais les impératifs qui en découlent conduisent à la destruction de nombreux quartiers dans lesquels son histoire était inscrite. Toutefois, en dehors du centre proprement dit, apparaîtront les réalisations extérieures à 1935 et le Kremlin, avec ses remparts du XVe siècle et ses églises remarquables demeureront le plus bel exemple architectural de la ville.

ARCHITECTURE. — Depuis 1935, l'évolution de l'architecture semble avoir tranché plusieurs stades. De 1935 à 1940, les immeubles à usage d'habitation comprennent cinq étages et plus ; d'aspect austère, ils abritent de très petits appartements, le problème primordial étant de remplacer le plus de cuisines possibles par des logements de confort minimum. Ces immeubles s'inscrivent dans des quartiers comprenant : jardins d'enfants, crèches, clubs ouvriers, terrains de jeux. Parmi les grands édifices publics de cette époque, on se doit de citer la Maison du Conseil des Ministres, dont les lignes austères ne sont pas atténuées par une décoration surchargée. L'Hôtel Moscava et les immeubles de la rue Gorki sont aussi caractéristiques. Un ralentissement très net de la construction a été ressenti nettement de 1940 à 1945. Par contre, la période qui s'étend de 1945 à 1950 a vu apparaître la masse énorme de blocs rassemblés en groupes monolithiques, composés autour d'un bâtiment central très élevé en forme de flèche. Le plus connu de tous est l'Université, dont la flèche atteint 240 m. Mais l'importance de l'ensemble est tel qu'il est difficile, même de pelle, d'évaluer, en plan et en volume, ses dimensions réelles. Dans le même esprit, cet été édifiée un hôtel, quelques immeubles d'habitation et de bureaux ; puis cette solution s'étant avérée par trop onéreuse en raison de l'importance des circulations verticales et horizontales disproportionnées avec le nombre des locaux desservis, fut abandonnée. A partir de 1951, toutes les constructions nouvelles ont été soumises aux directives de l'Institut du Plan de Moscou.

Les immeubles d'habitation sont alors de trois à six étages, sans ascenseurs, et abritent des appartements de deux à trois pièces. Dans un même quartier, des bâtiments longs de 50 à 100 m sont alignés, sans unité architecturale, en bordure de rues se coupant à angle droit. Les façades sont chargées de décorations : corniches, denticules, balcons ouvragés, colonnettes, etc. Cette tendance s'atténuait mais les architectes hésitent encore à réaliser des façades lisses et dépouillées de tout ornement. Il n'y a plus de colonnes, ni d'ornements en saillie, mais le béton n'est pas complètement plat. Les édifices publics ont naturellement été conçus selon les mêmes principes.

TECHNIQUES DE CONSTRUCTION. — Deux sortes de techniques sont adoptées : Construction par murs porteurs en briques. — L'épaisseur des murs extérieurs est alors de 50 à 60 cm, les briques de 3,5 × 11 × 22 et présentent des fentes très rapprochées, de 5 à 10 mm d'épaisseur, disposées parallèlement à la façade et constituant une multitude de vides d'air. Sur ces murs reposent des poutres préfabriquées du même type que celles décrites ci-dessous. — Préfabrication lourde. — Ce procédé d'industrialisation ne s'apparente pas à nos systèmes français. Il s'agit, à Moscou, d'assemblages d'éléments de façades, massifs, réunis par des linteaux supportant des dalles en béton de grande portée préfabriquée séparément en usine, à partir d'un béton peu armé et de très forte épaisseur. Les linteaux sont assurées par gravitation et par ancrage après mise en place, ce qui conduit à des murs extérieurs dont les trumeaux sont des blocs de béton de 60 cm d'épaisseur, de 2,70 m de haut et de 1,60 m de large, percés de trous cylindriques de 20 cm de diamètre dont l'axe est vertical quand l'élément est en place. Une feuillure est prévue pour permettre l'encastrement des fenêtres. Les allèges, de même nature, s'emboîtent dans les trumeaux. La mise en place des éléments de façade est effectuée par grues. Ils sont alors posés sur un bain de mortier ; le calage est assez difficile. Les faces extérieures et intérieures sont suffisamment lisses pour être laissées apparentes, ou enduites et peintes après rejointement au mortier. Les linteaux reposent sur les trumeaux. Les murs de refend, parallèles aux façades, et supportant les planchers, sont des blocs de béton alvéolés de 45 cm d'épaisseur, 160 de long et 170 de haut. Puisque les murs ne sont pas réunis par les linteaux comme les éléments des façades, un coulage de béton est nécessaire pour assurer la liaison. Les cloisons sont formées d'éléments standard de 10 cm d'épaisseur, d'une surface variable, en fibres agglomérées de ciment avec armature bois. Les planchers sont composés d'éléments juxtaposés de 25 cm d'épaisseur, 120 de large et d'une longueur variable. Les éléments sont réunis bout à bout par des fers de 8 mm, soudés et encrochés de 60 cm. La face du plancher est laissée apparente, une couche de béton est coulée sur la face supérieure avec revêtement de sol normal. Les escaliers comprennent, en général, deux volées par étage ; les paliers reposent sur les murs porteurs. Les fenêtres, ouvrant à l'intérieur, sont à double vitrage, distants entre eux de 20 à 30 cm. Les bâtiments réalisés à partir de ces éléments préfabriqués sont, en général, de 5 étages, longs de 50 mètres et larges de 13. Un mur de refend, parallèle aux façades divise en deux la portée de treize mètres.

Moscou est actuellement un vaste chantier. Les voies de circulation sont définitivement tracées. Certains quartiers sont déjà réalisés. Les constructions, d'esprit différent, sont encore chargées de décorations, mais il semble qu'une plus grande liberté d'expression est, enfin, laissée aux architectes, ce qui peut permettre d'espérer une évolution heureuse dans la recherche de formes.

Les petites maisons vétustes en bois, visibles en haut de page, disparaissent peu à peu. A leur emplacement s'élèvent des immeubles préfabriqués répondant à des tendances différentes sur le plan architectural. Le grand immeuble de 12 niveaux présenté ci-contre, dont la façade est si curieusement ornementée, a été achevé en 1955. Le bâtiment de 4 étages représente le type le plus actuel de construction réalisé en béton de forte épaisseur (préfabrication lourde). Les deux photographies en bas de page montrent : l'une, la mise en place d'éléments de façade de grande dimension, l'autre, le résultat obtenu à partir de ces éléments. Les autres bâtiments cités dans le texte ont déjà été publiés dans notre Revue (voir « A.A. » n° 59, avril 1955 ; n° 67-68, octobre 1956 ; n° 70, février 1957).

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Figure 22.2.
"Moscou. Urbanisme, architecture et techniques de construction" in *L'architecture d'aujourd'hui*, 1957, 74.

ety for Cultural Relations with the USSR. Ling had drawn on Swedish urban planning and taken part in the debate on the "crisis of high-rise building."[28] In his official lecture on "Project Planning: Functional and Aesthetic Moments," Ling held back from taking a clear position. He mentioned the difficulties in planning created by private property, but did not clearly advocate stronger state direction. He defended the division of cities into quarters and advocated variety in construction, which he understood as the "human factor" in urban planning. Ling had numerous informal discussions with the secretary of the architects' association, S. P. Tituchenko, which were recorded by the VOKS representative V. V. Kutuzov and passed on to the international division of the architects' association.[29] While crossing the southwest along the main street of Leninskii prospect on the way to the railway station, Ling criticized the scale of the arterial road and argued against the symmetric positioning of buildings and green spaces that did not correspond to "human" scales. Furthermore, he gave practical advice on how to separate vehicle and pedestrian traffic. He assessed the new development in "Novye Cheremushki" positively. The report paid considerable attention to the emotional tone of the conversation: irony, humor and praise were quoted word for word.

Ling also traveled to Stalingrad, which of course was of particular interest for him on account of the comparisons between its reconstruction and that of Coventry. According to the report, the extent of the construction work impressed Ling, although he placed greater emphasis on the comparison of technology. The report also quoted his statements on Stalingrad: "I have never seen anything comparable," and "[It is] an unbelievably large site." Ling was extremely positive about the design of the green spaces.

During another journey, there was more specific discussion about the impact of different political and economic systems on architecture and urban planning. The report saw the advantages of the socialist system confirmed when the discussion turned to private property in England. Ling spoke of conflicts between the interests of landowners and society. According to Ling, 40% of the building area for residential housing had been bought by the state:

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28 Junichi Hasegawea, *Replanning the Blitzed City Centre: A Comparative Study of Bristol, Coventry and Southampton, 1941–1950* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1992); Junichi Hasegawea, "The Rise and Fall of Radical Reconstruction in 1940s Britain," *Twentieth Century British History* 10 (1999): 137–61.

29 RGALI, f. 674, op. 3, d. 1465, l. 31–37.

"We are trying to construct socialism without revolution," remarked Ling—"not without irony."

In general, the conversation really does seem to have genuinely represented a means of exchange for the Soviets, i.e., the goal was to gather information about foreign impressions and reach a consensus. A comparison of systems is only reflected in elementary questions regarding the economy and administration. Because Ling brought with him a moderate position, there were barely any stylistic controversies. The interest in the further development of architecture and urban planning were both founded on the claim to the "humanity" of the environment.

During the congress, the most famous Western European architects and urban planners were accompanied by accomplished Soviet architects. Nikolai Kolli was the long-standing president of the Moscow Academy for Architects. He had overseen the project for the Tsentrosoiuz building by Le Corbusier in Moscow in the 1920s and 1930s.[30] He had already traveled to Western Europe with the UIA before 1958, to Great Britain and other destinations. His personal notes during the congress also document informal encounters.[31] At the first meeting of the representatives of the foreign delegations at the airport, the Dutch architect Cornelis Van Esteren already recalled an earlier meeting with Kolli at the CIAM congress, which had taken place in Moscow in 1925–26. The delegates from Western Europe repeatedly expressed the desire to view the iconic constructivist buildings: the students hostel by Nikolaev, Ginzburg's Narkomfin building, and Le Corbusier's Dom Tsentrosoiuza. The extent to which these locations were so removed from Kolli's image of the city can be seen in the fact that he visited the hostel and the Narkomfin building before the arranged meeting with the guests on 23 July in order to investigate the state they were in. The halls of residence "made such a shabby impression that it was not possible to show them to the foreigners." After lunch, Kolli went by bus with a group of Englishmen to the Ulitsa Chaikovskogo in order view Ginzburg's Narkomfin building. The group then went on to the "Dom Tsentrosoiuza." On 25 July, Kolli took the same route with a group of French guests and Van Esteren. The foreigners en-

30 Jean-Louis Cohen, *Le Corbusier and the Mystique of the USSR: Theories and Projects for Moscow, 1928–1936* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987).

31 RGALI, f. 2773, op. 1, d. 72 (Nikolai Kolli, "Diary during the Congress, 14.7.-6.8.1958").

thusiastically took a group photograph in front of the Tsentrosoiuz building. The stopping points created a route through the city that lay outside the official excursion program and supplied both Kolli and his guests with a picture of the city composed of different, individual experiences. For the Western European architects, the group photograph in front of Le Corbusier's building updated the path of development from the constructivist buildings of the 1920s and 1930s to the new postwar constructions. For Kolli, the trip to places he had forgotten or that had fallen victim to a collective "amnesia"[32] inspired different thoughts on architectonic development: instead of drawing a line from the 1920s and 1930s to contemporary buildings, Kolli described a dialectical movement in the alteration of building forms, in which constructivism, which he referred to as "nihilism," was ascribed to the past.

A short glance at the Moscow congress of 1958 shows that a "friendly atmosphere" really could be created in which it was possible to find common points of discussion. A closer examination of the discussion on postwar architecture and urban planning between East and West clearly demonstrates that on both sides there existed heterogeneous discourses on modern functional building. The socio-economic concerns of urban planning often superseded stylistic and aesthetic controversies. Common goals ("reconstruction") regularly allowed one to ignore differences in appearance. The rationalization of construction also represented a bridging factor.

At particular moments, however, different ideas came to the fore, sparked by the exhibited material. Spatial planning, including the way it was communicated using graphic depictions and schematic plans, and the material level of building design and the planning of green spaces revealed different experiences and ways of discussion of the term "urban." These created different areas of tension.

Above all, tours around local sites, particularly during informal encounters and unplanned trips, produced nuanced perceptions of the city. This multiplicity of perspectives was not generated from softening political and ideological views; instead, social hierarchies shaped the perception and depiction of detailed aspects of building. In addition, different personal

32 Stephen V. Bittner, "Remembering the Avant-Garde: Moscow Architects and the 'Rehabilitation' of Constructivism, 1961–64," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 3 (2001): 553–76.

memories and attitudes determined mutual perceptions. An examination of the congress therefore also shows that the architects and urban planners knew or experienced more than they depicted and discussed in the public architectural debate. In turn, this also meant that the specialized press, in particular the picture press, employed their own mechanisms and perhaps had a longer and greater impact upon urban discourse. It is important for further examinations of the postwar exchanges in architecture to find out more about the distributing mechanisms and opportunities for the exchange of pictures between East and West, specifically in architectural literature. This perspective would aim to identify particular forms of perceiving the city among Eastern and Western architects as created or spread by the media or material aesthetics, which in the long term and in different ways also determined urban policy.

23

Zagreb as the Location of the "New Tendencies" International Art Movement (1961–73)

Ljilana Kolesnik

Within the narrative of life in the former Communist Bloc, socialist Yugoslavia was (and still is) always represented as "something else," as a country with a relatively liberal lifestyle, open borders, free circulation of people, and an intensive cultural exchange with the world. Yugoslavia's "authentic path to socialism"—a political project produced by a complex combination of historical circumstances marking the beginning of the Cold War—unquestionably belonged within the framework of communist ideology, but its approach was one of greater flexibility and an understanding of socialism as an essentially modern, experimental social model that has to be constantly adapted to the "level of self-awareness of the working class." It was a state of permanent transition that critically marked life in socialist Yugoslavia and resulted in quite a specific historical experience of totalitarianism that was hard to compare—at least at the level of human freedoms and freedom of expression—with the experiences of the communist countries of the Western Bloc. However, such a radical break with Soviet political practice certainly would not have happened without the experience of the Second World War, when the Yugoslav Communist Party (YCP) organized and waged a war against fascism and al-

most single-handedly liberated most of southeast Europe. Although an obedient member of the postwar "communist brotherhood," it could not accept just partial independence, and in 1948 the YCP was punished by being excluded from the international Communist Information Bureau. Almost immediately, the YCP started to suffer numerous, harsh, and pointless attacks by the USSR and other European communist parties that turned at the beginning of 1949 into a raging anti-Yugoslav campaign, reaching its culmination at the World Congress for Peace in Warsaw in 1950.[1] Rather restrained in its previous reactions to such events, the YCP decided to respond and to organize a countermeeting, the International Conference for the Defense of Peace, which was due to take place in Zagreb in 1952. By deciding to invite the most prominent left-oriented European artists, writers and cultural activists who were not members of pro-Soviet communist parties—Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, for example—the YCP wanted to stress the profound difference between Yugoslav and Soviet political choices and to demonstrate a much broader and more tolerant approach to different positions on the European left. Apart from the translation of Sartre's works, preparations for the conference also included the exhibition of *French Modern Art* arranged with the Musée d'Art Moderne in Paris. The international press coverage and the success of the exhibition—that was presented in the capitals of all the Yugoslav republics—transformed a politically motivated cultural event into a project of almost symbolic meaning, marking the beginning of the new era in official cultural policy. As early as the end of 1953, the Yugoslav government established a federal commission for "international cultural exchange," which started to organize numerous traveling exhibitions of Yugoslav art in Latin America, Europe, Asia, and countries of the Western Bloc (after 1956), presentations of Yugoslav artists at major international exhibitions, and presentations of European modern art in Yugoslavia. Up to the end of the 1950s, there were at least twenty major surveys of Italian, French, Swedish, German, and American modern art presented in Belgrade, Zagreb, and Ljubljana, accompanied from 1956 by numerous exhibitions based on direct exchanges between Yugoslav and foreign museums or on private con-

1 It seems that for Yugoslav artists and intellectuals, most painful was the fact that these attacks brought together two antifascist icons of Europe—Pablo Picasso and Paul Eluard. For more on the Yugoslav perception of the Congress, see Krsto Hegedušić, "Dva Jacques Loius Davida i mi," *Republika* 7/10 (October 1951): 765.

tacts; this soon became normal cultural practice, resulting in much more accurate information about the situation on the international art scene.

The dynamics and intensity of Yugoslav engagement in international politics (participation in the Non-Aligned Movement) resulted at the beginning of the 1960s in another very important political decision. In 1960, all Yugoslav citizens received their passports and were free to travel wherever they wanted and import whichever "cultural products" they wanted—books, magazines, records—tax-free. More information generated different perceptions of art and a demand for different types of cultural production, to which federal and local authorities responded with a number of international cultural manifestations, initiated between 1961 and 1963, which enlivened the Yugoslav cultural scene. The intention of these manifestations was to stimulate collaboration with foreign artists and to prove the self-awareness and ability of Yugoslav society to establish creative interchanges with the international art scene without losing its historical and ideological perspective. Thereby, at the music biennial (launched in 1961), the Croatian/Yugoslav public had an opportunity to hear and see the performances of John Cage, Nam June Paik, Charlotte Moorman, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Mauricio Kagel, Dieter Schnebel, Pierre Schaeffer, Ann Halprin and Dancers' Workshop Company, and a lot of other artists from all over the world. In addition to the New Tendencies exhibitions in Zagreb, it was possible to attend public lectures by Umberto Ecco, Abraham Moles, Max Bense, Giulio Carlo Argan, Gillo Dorfles, or Filiberto Menna. However, if you were not particularly interested in the visual arts you could always visit the island of Korčula, enroll at the Korčula Summer School of Philosophy (from 1964 to 1974) and listen to lectures by Herbert Marcuse, Ernst Bloch, Erich Fromm, Jürgen Habermas, or Henri Lefebvre, as well as to a number of other West and East European and Yugoslav philosophers, sharing the values of the European New Left. If we add to the list the Genre Experimental Film Festival (GEFF, launched in 1963) that was presenting impressive international selections of contemporary filmmakers, translations of contemporary literature and philosophy,[2] the eruption of rock music and the expansion of mass media and popular culture, we get a

2 The first translations of Lefebvre's works were published in Yugoslavia in 1958; up until the mid-1960s almost everything Erich Fromm had written was also published. Benjamin's essays appeared in specialized magazines as early as 1965, and his *Illuminations* were published in 1974, three years after the first translations of Althusser's works.

general outline of the intense process of "opening" that had far-reaching cultural and psycho-social consequences.

The situation on the Croatian art scene at the time was much like in other European countries—the mainstream was dominated by numerous variations of modernist abstraction, while in its margins there were the activities of the art group Gorgona, a member of the international Fluxus network, as well as the remnants of geometric abstraction still highly influential in the field of graphic design. Each of these art phenomena were at least partially connected to the work of Radoslav Putar, Mića Bašičević, and Božo Bek, a team of agile, well-informed art critics who ran the Zagreb City Gallery and were interested in new art practices. Thanks to their activities, at the beginning of the 1960s Zagreb became a lively city of arts providing a proper framework for yet another art phenomenon that already existed, but in the form of numerous, unconnected individual art practices scattered around the globe. The initial impulse to bring them together came from the young Brazilian painter Alvin Mavignier (who lived in Germany at the time) and was the outcome of his encounter with the Croatian art critic Matko Meštrović, who had also had a rather negative impression of the Thirtieth Venice Biennale, where they first met, and who shared the artist's opinion that such an "apotheosis" of gestural abstraction deserved a proper response.[3] Accepting Mavignier's initiative, Zagreb City Gallery organized a survey of art practices from the margins of the European mainstream, that—in contrast to the social indifference of modernist abstraction—were advocating an experimental, rational approach to art, as well as an active and socially engaged relation to existential reality. The gallery provided space and the appropriate technical conditions, while Mavignier selected the works of art and made preliminary arrangements with foreign artists who took part in the exhibition entitled *New Tendencies*, held in August 1961 in Zagreb.[4] The common ground of art presented at the exhibition was an exceptionally critical relation to high modernist abstraction expressed through a multiplicity of themes and

3 The Grand Awards of the Thirtieth Venice Biennale were given to Jean Fautrier and Hans Hartung; see Renato Boschetto, ed., *30. Biennale Internazionale d'Arte* (Venice: Longo & Zoppelli, 1960).

4 The twenty-eight artists present at the first exhibition of New Tendencies included Piero Manzoni, Maurizio Castellani, Alberto Massironi, Alberto Biasi, Gruppo N, Getulio Alviani, and Piero Dorazio (Italy); Alvin Mavignier, Günter Üecker, Otto Piene, and Heinz Mack (Germany); Andreas Christen and Karl Gestner (Switzerland); Robert Cruz-Diez and Julio Le Parc (Argentina); Hugo Rodolfo da Marco (Venezuela); Ivan Picelj, Vjenceslav Richter, and Julije Knifer (Croatia); and François Morellet (France).

subjects and in rather disparate ways: from neoconstructivist, concrete, and object art, to tautological and monochromatic painting and system-oriented types of visual research. The outcome of the exhibition was a spontaneously organized artistic international network that continued to be operative well into the following year, when a larger group of artists exhibiting in Zagreb met again in the Parisian studio of the art group GRAV and came to the conclusion that they supported the idea of further collaboration, joint research, and joint presentation of their works. Following this decision they all appeared at the *NT2* exhibition, which was again held in Zagreb City Gallery in August 1963, this time giving the impression of an already defined international art movement. A number of discussions that were going on simultaneously with the exhibition defined the basic outlines of the future program of New Tendencies and generated a new concept of art which fitted into the theoretical framework of the movement. According to the general conclusion of these discussions, art had to be understood as a rational, experimental activity rejecting any type of subjectivism, individualism, or romanticism, encouraging the use of new media and new technologies, requiring closer ties between art and "material production," insisting on the measurability of the aesthetic effect and on the complete abandonment of aesthetic judgment. Bringing a rational model of art to the very edge of self-abnegation and its subsequent reestablishment within the normative framework of science, *NT2* established theoretically and aesthetically rather rigid, socially engaged lines of future action, which opened a range of complex questions regarding its relation to society. Firmly believing that rational, technologically sustained industrial production of art objects could annihilate the fetishist and socially exclusive character of the work of art as it was defined by a hegemonic conception of high modernist abstraction, the ideologists of New Tendencies expected—as did all the avant-garde movements before them—that it would affect not only social relations within the world of art, but social relations at all levels of existential practice. However, the products of "new art for the new technological age" that were supposed to radically transform our living environment and refine our perception of reality required clarity of vision, which has to be trained and brought to human consciousness by the very quality of art objects produced by the members of New Tendencies, or as it was formulated by Matko Meštrović in his retrospective assessments of the move-

ment: "I believed the artists' emphasis on the purely visual would strengthen the perceptive capability of the viewer, allowing the development of a mental attitude which will permit him to perceive reality with greater clarity, and more lucid awareness of its meanings. And above all the opportunity which it offers to act."[5] The heroism surrounding Meštrović's vision—deeply incorporated in the program outlines of New Tendencies and insisting on strong interrelations between art and modern society—was rather close to the impetus of historical avant-garde and could be positioned on the line of continuity of productivist tradition. However, the very process through which it was defined revealed a range of insurmountable differences among the members of the movement, announcing its slow disintegration. The transposition of interest from artistic to critical and theoretical discourse, and the glorification of technology, science, and rational views on art estranged from New Tendencies the artists who were engaged with the spiritual origins of modernism, and in 1963 the poetic framework of art produced within the movement became rather narrow. Some sixty-two artists and art groups from twelve countries and two continents (Europe and Latin America) exhibited at *NT2*, but the group of artists presented in Zagreb in 1961 was rather small and included only those artists who were ready to accept a strictly rational notion of art, joined for the first time by members of the French group GRAV, the Italian Gruppo "T" and the Spanish Equipo 57.

However, by 1965 when the third New Tendencies exhibition was supposed to take place, the cultural, political, and social context had changed. An international art movement that had initially gathered artists advocating a type of artistic expression in the margins of the European art scene at the beginning of the 1960s moved unexpectedly into the mainstream. Awards, exhibitions, and participation in the major art shows (*Oltre l'informale*, San Marino, 1963; *Nouvelle Tendance*, Musée d'Arts Decoratifs, Paris, 1964; Thirty-second Venice Biennale, 1964[6]) resulted in the accelerated commodification and musealization of New Tendencies. This became even more obvious after the exhibition *Responsive Eye* (New York, MOMA, 1965), which suc-

5 Matko Meštrović, "Computer and Visual Research—Ways of Thinking and Scope of Acting," in *Dispersion of Meaning: The Fading out of the Doctrinaire World?* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), 18.

6 At the Twenty-third Venice Biennale, Julo le Parc won the Grand Biennale Award in the category of painting. As his work did not match any traditional art category, the Biennale jury had to abolish all categories, which were never applied again.

Figure 23.1.
Ivan Picelj, exhibition poster for *New Tendencies 2*, Zagreb, 1963.
Courtesy Museum of Contemporary Art Zagreb.

cessfully neutralized the ideological timber of the movement and equalized the ideologically and socially motivated optical research of European artists with purely decorative American Pop art.

The weakening of ideational coherence and the trivialization of previous achievements and problems in the social perception of New Tendencies became the only topics of the third exhibition, entitled *New Tendency 3*, held in Zagreb in August 1965[7] following the concept defined by the Italian artist Enzo Mari. However, the intended outcome of his concept—"ideological concentration and unity of objectives" based on the synthesis of art, science and technology and a shared view of art as a rational, experimental, collective activity firmly integrated in modern industrial society—was not justified by the art production itself. The new membership of the movement, increasing almost daily, did not make any significant contribution to the advancement of its working procedures, while the older members of New Tendencies "have already exhausted all of their initial enthusiasm," and according to Alberta Biasi, "became either the eclectics or plain craftsmen."[8] A range of mediocre works from *New Tendency 3* clearly pointed to the fact that New Tendencies, as modernist abstraction before it, was entering a period of crisis, which seriously undermined the socially progressive program orientation of the movement, as well as its intention to take the avant-garde position in European art.

Considering this uncontested crisis, the next exhibition, *Tendencies 4*, held at various locations in Zagreb from May to September 1969, made a radical turn toward a completely new field of visual research—toward new electronic media (television, computers, video, etc.) and an examination of the phenomenon of mass communication. At the time, computer technology required an experimental, structured, and collaborative approach, which—when conveyed in the field of visual research—was in profound harmony with the ideological orientation of the movement and almost succeeded in returning New Tendencies to their enthusiastic beginnings. Furthermore, after failed attempts to give concrete form to a constructivist utopia using the

7 At the *New Tendency 3* exhibition, there were 108 artists from eighteen countries and three continents. In addition to fourteen American artists, there were also numerous artists from the USSR (the art group Dvizenie), the Czech Republic, Poland, and Hungary.

8 Alberto Biasis's comment on *New Tendency 3*, quoted in Ješa Denegri, *Umjetnost konstruktivnog pristupa: Exat 51 i Nove tendencije* (Zagreb: Horetzky, 2000), 116.

Figure 23.2. View of the exhibition *Tendencies 4*, Gallery of Contemporary Art. Courtesy Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb.

technological, scientific, and cognitive possibilities of modern society, the interest for new electronic media managed to define a completely new utopian horizon of visual arts, whose ideational (and ideological) framework rested on the conviction that the technology of visual mass communication could be the instrument of positive social changes. The culmination of the events that belonged to the process of preparation for the fourth New Tendencies exhibition was an international seminar, "Computers and Visual Research," which began in Zagreb on 3 August 1968, just one day after the opening of the famous London exhibition *Cybernetic Serendipity*. However, to demonstrate the possibilities of computer technology, the organizers of the Zagreb seminar also prepared a small exhibition of computer graphics and computer-aided works of art that were—as opposed to the intention of the London exhibition—looking for the possibility to "bridge computer art with social and political implications, as well as with new philosophical and aesthetical theories on Information aesthetics."[9] The seminar and exhibition induced an extraordinary and unexpected outburst of creative energies and generated a number of important discussions on a broad range of subjects—from human–machine "interaction" and the philosophical and social implications of

9 Christoph Klütsch, "The Summer of 1968 in London and Zagreb: Starting or End Point for Computer Art?" *Creativity & Cognition* (2005): 109.

the imminent transfer from industrial to information-based society, to the still limited contribution of computer technology to the democratization of mass communication and the realization of artistic ideas and concepts.

Long and serious preparations resulted in an exhibition that, despite a relatively small number of participants[10] and an equally modest quantity of works of art, gave a theoretically convincing and methodologically comprehensive survey of a (short) history of art in new media. Another very important result of the events surrounding Tendencies 4 was a magazine—*bit international*—which was the first professional publication in the Yugoslav cultural space strictly dedicated to the theory of art and theory of mass media, and one of the earliest European magazines of its kind launched at the end of 1968. *bit international* almost immediately acquired a broad network of contributors writing on information aesthetics (Max Bense and Abraham Moles), on cyber aesthetics (Herbert Franke[11] and Evan Harris Walker) on participative and generative aesthetics (Michael Noll, Frieder Neke, Georg Nees, and Kurd Asleben) and a number of other topics concerning the interrelation of art and media of mass communication, producing the articles that lay the theoretical foundation of the phenomenon that would be defined only thirty years later as new media art.

The fifth and last exhibition of New Tendencies, held in Zagreb in June and July 1973, established by its very title—*Tendencies 5*—a clear distance to the principle of "ideological concentration and unique objectives" and to the very idea of the art movement. In addition to the section "Computers and Visual Research," there was also—presented for the first time in Yugoslavia at an exhibition of such magnitude—an international selection of conceptual art, signifying the final break with the ideology of high modernism to which New Tendencies firmly belonged. Although it was cultural phenomena that attracted to Zagreb a really impressive number of foreign artists, New Tendencies was not met with a particularly positive response on the local art scene, possibly because of its initial formal and poetical heterogeneity, elitism,

10 At *Tendencies 4* there were 102 artists from twelve countries, but only 61 of them exhibited within the section "Computers and Visual Research," while the others were included in the small retrospective of the movement or in the section *Typoezija*/Typoetry/, curated by Željka Čorak, Želimir Koščević, and Biljana Tomić.

11 In 1970, Herbert Franke curated the exhibition *Art and Technology* at the Thirty-fifth Venice Biennale, proving that as early as the 1960s, computer technology was yet another social phenomenon that radically undermined the modernist notion of art.

uncontested exclusivity, and the preponderance of theoretical explanations that were not always in line with actual art practice. From the perspective of the international art scene, interest in New Tendencies ceased after 1965, and was renewed only recently, boosted by the interest in the history of new media art and in Zagreb which, although not the only location of New Tendencies, certainly was the one that provided this international art movement with a functional institutional framework and a sense of continuity.

24

The Graphic Arts Biennials in the 1950s and 1960s: The Slim "Cut" in the Iron Curtain—The Bulgarian Case

Irina Genova

The biennials were initially created with the aim of promoting the national states—similar to the international exhibitions of the second half of the nineteenth century, but in a specialized art field. The first of these was the Venice Biennale, which started in 1895. The Biennial in San Paolo (1951) was based on the same principle, however, in combination with international curators' exhibitions, which were later introduced in the Venice Biennale.

After the Second World War, in the 1950s, the policies of the biennials took into consideration the situation of the Iron Curtain. In the second half of the twentieth century, periodical forums appeared putting forward alternatives to the national presentations. Among the most prestigious was documenta, founded in Kassel in 1955 and showing selected artists. In terms of form and style, the Iron Curtain in the second half of the 1950s seemed to separate the freedom of abstract art, whose main protagonists were artists from the United States and, in another variant too, Art Informel[1] in West-

1 "Art Informel" is a term designating a multitude of practices in painting after the Second World War till the beginning of the 1960s, mainly in France. What unifies all of those practices is the nonfigural image and spontaneity as well as the differentiation from the constructive abstraction (for example, Piet Mondri-

ern Europe, from the dogmas of socialist realism, forged in the USSR. The question of abstract art acquired a distinct political aspect.

In Bulgaria in the 1960s propaganda texts were published "targeting" abstract art. Among them, the book with the highest ideological rating was Atanas Stoykov's book *Criticism of Abstract Art and Its Theories* (Sofia, 1963, published by Nauka I Izkustvo [Science and art]). It was followed by *After the Decline of Abstractionism* by the same author (Sofia 1970, an edition of the Bulgarian Communist Party). These publications, with their vulgar ideologization of the artistic differences and peculiarities of nonrealistic images, would be of interest for a special commentary. In terms of form and style, "abstract" is used as a synonym of "decadent," "reactionary" and "hostile" from the positions of communist ideology. As far as Pop art is concerned, the opinion is that "the artist turns into a common copyist and combiner." He is "new clear evidence of the decline of contemporary western bourgeois painting."[2]

Today, it is surprising that, during the same years, works that were created, shown and given awards in forums in the West, beyond the Iron Curtain, were well known, at least from reproductions, to artists in Bulgaria. Stoykov's book from 1963, for example, includes reproductions, sometimes in color, of works by Jackson Pollock (p. 181), Antoni Tàpies (p. 190), Alberto Burri (p. 191), Alexander Calder (p. 203) and others.[3] Many of those who got hold of the book looked at the illustrations without reading the text in depth. It turns out that the myth of the artists being uninformed was to some extent due to deceptive memory or it was possibly created so as to defend the certain distancing of Bulgarian artists from what was happening on the artistic scene elsewhere. ("We did not have access to information about the topical tendencies.")

During the rule of the Communist Party, Bulgaria last participated in the Venice Biennale in 1964. That was also the last time that the USSR participated, with a large group of artists representative of realism—including Alexander Deyneka, Vladimir Favorski, etc. In the same year, the award for foreign participation went to Robert Rauschenberg. In *After the Decline of Abstrac-*

an and De Stijl). The name, which turned into a general term, was first used by the French art critic Michel Tapié in 1952.

2 Atanas Stoykov, *Sled zanika na abstrakcionizma* (Sofia: Bulgarian Communist Party, 1970), 93.

3 The book had a circulation of 2,080 copies, which is quite a large circulation for Bulgaria, and the price of 2.50 leva made it affordable.

tionism, Stoykov exclaimed: "In the Venice Biennale of 1964 they went as far as to give first prize to Rauschenberg."[4] The American Pop art in that edition of the Biennale was represented by Jasper Johns, Jim Dine, and Claes Oldenburg. The European media criticized the choice of the winner of the first prize. There was a strong reaction against American art in publications of the Soviet press. Stoykov, in the capacity of commissioner of the Bulgarian collection, published an article in *Izkustvo* magazine, in which the Biennale was presented as "captured" by American Pop artists.[5] After describing in detail the works of Robert Rauschenberg, Morris Louis, Kenneth Noland, and Frank Stella, referring to the statements of the commissioner of the American presentation, Stoykov concluded that "today, there is not a trace of protest in the American Pop art trend." That's why, according to the ideologist of "socialist art," Pop art did not deserve to exist.

Today, the reproductions in Stoykov's article on the Biennale are of exceptional interest—they show works by American, European and Japanese artists and eight reproductions from the Bulgarian collection. The works of the Bulgarian authors looked archaic, as if they came from the decade prior to the Second World War and could be connected, especially the sculptures, with the ideological requirements—regarding theme, form and style—of "socialist realism." At the end of the article, the commissioner concluded that Bulgarian art did not imitate Western art, but "confidently followed its own path—that of socialist realism."[6]

In his book *In the Shadow of Yalta*, Piotr Piotrowski points out, not without grounds, that there has never been any real thaw in Bulgaria.[7] There were no alternative art groups and alternative art, in contrast to the former Czechoslovakia, Hungary, or Poland. There were no Bulgarian participants in art networks of artistic exchange that provided alternatives to the official channels.

Indeed, the invitations for participation in exhibitions abroad were sent not only through the official society—the Union of Bulgarian Artists; the graphic arts biennials, in particular, invited individually renowned artists. However, the international art forums themselves were not part of the field

4 Stoykov, Sled zanika na abstrakcionizma, 77.

5 Atanas Stoykov, "Sled zanika", *Izkustvo* 9–10 (1964): 65–72.

6 Ibid.

7 Piotr Piotrowski, *In the Shadow of Yalta: Art and the Avant-garde in Eastern Europe, 1945–1989* (London: Reaktion Books, 2009), 63 and 97.

of alternative manifestations. Yet, even in this situation of state control, there was a certain stir in the art milieu.[8] There were debates mostly concerning the form and style features of contemporary art. The look was directed to other artistic milieus from the socialist camp.

In the West, the motivation behind the periodical art forums was no longer the national comparison but the manifestation of the political will for promoting liberal art practices, the world competition between ideologies and places. In a short text on the topic, "Art and the Cold War" in the book *Art since 1900*, Rosalind Krauss points out: "With Germany, the battlefield of the capitalist-communist confrontation, the desire to flaunt the rewards of West German postwar reconstruction in the face of East Germany led to the establishment of an international exhibition, documenta, in Kassel, an industrial city in the northeast corner of the FDR, just a few miles away from an installation of international ballistic missiles pointed at the Soviet Union." And further on: "The American entries in the early years stressed the importance of Pollock and the other abstract expressionists as well as the commercial splendor of Pop art."[9]

Central and Eastern Europe rose to the challenge by launching their international art forums. The most important forums in the first decades after the Second World War included the newly founded graphic arts biennials (such biennials were also founded in the West in the 1950s and 1960s).

In the years after the Second World War, within the context of the Iron Curtain, graphic arts biennials were of particular significance. It is no accident that from the middle of the 1950s until the beginning of the 1970s, international graphic arts biennials seemed to mushroom. Graphic arts travel easily and the resources needed for graphic arts exhibitions are fewer compared to other cases. The graphic sheets, even with their increased sizes, were intended for small exhibitions and did not require big storage depots. Furthermore, the interest in the technical mastery and resourcefulness in the graphic prints protected them from the expectations/requirements for direct ideological connectedness.

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8 In 1961–62, there were heated discussions of exhibitions in the Union of Bulgarian Artists. The minutes from those discussions were partially published in *Izkustvo* magazine, issued by the Union of Bulgarian Artists.

9 Rosalind Krauss, "Art and the Cold War," in Art since 1900, (London: Thames and Hudson, 2012), 424.

Today I am surprised to discover that in the Graphic Arts Biennial in Ljubljana in 1963, the first prize was awarded to Robert Rauschenberg, and in compliance with the regulations of the biennial he launched a solo exhibition there in 1965, on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the foundation of the forum and a year after his award at the Venice Biennale. It is interesting that Rauschenberg owes his first international distinction to Ljubljana. Both editions of the Biennial in Ljubljana—in 1963 and 1965—saw the participation of large groups of Bulgarian artists. They were able to present next to art figures such as Serge Poliakoff, Karel Appel, Gerhard Wind, etc. This is how the common exhibitions of artists from two politically separated worlds came about—this time in Central Europe.

I am trying to imagine whether Bulgarian artists knew beforehand about the (Western) European and American scenes and what exactly they knew. How did they combine in their minds the ideological requirements for the artistic image, most often set by Soviet art criticism, with the autonomy of art propagated in the American periodicals?

The most active artistic exchange in the first decades of the twentieth century, until the Second World War, carried out by the art milieus in Sofia, was with Belgrade, Zagreb, and Ljubljana. At the beginning of the century the artistic contacts were realized within the framework of Lada, the Society of South Slavic Artists. At the end of the 1920s—and particularly in the 1930s, in the period between 1928 and 1938—a lot of visits and joint exhibitions were organized. The exchange with the cultural centers of the Yugoslavian Kingdom happened at a time of favorable political conjuncture.

Together with the political circumstances, what was also important was the linguistic closeness with Western neighbors, which undoubtedly facilitated communication. The situation with the other neighbors was different. Even though on the territory of the Ottoman Empire there was some kind of exchange of a different character, in the twentieth century communication in the Romanian, Greek, and Turkish languages became more difficult and even impossible without special training. Communication was mainly held in other European languages (e.g., French).

Belgrade, and especially Zagreb and Ljubljana, were perceived by the Bulgarian art milieus as linking the "Eastern Slavs" with the modernisms of the West. When the very first exhibition of Lada was held in 1904, the Bulgarian

art historian Andrey Protich wrote in an article in *Misul* (Reflection) magazine that the Croatian section had "the biggest perfection and absolute independence in terms of form." According to him, the Croatian artists had acquired the composition and the line, light, perspective, etc., to such an extent that "the visitor was captivated and dazzled by the joint impact of these form factors."[10] We can find many more examples to support the significance of the modern art of the "western" Slavs for the Bulgarian artists and art critics, as well as examples of the coverage of the Bulgarian exhibitions in our neighbors' press.

In 1928–29, Peter Morozov and Vasil Zahariev presented their prints at the graphic arts exhibition in Zagreb. Their participation was noticed and elicited many comments. Later, their participation was mentioned again by the critic.[11] In 1930, Morozov participated again in the graphic arts exhibition in Zagreb. In 1933, Bulgaria and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia drew closer together politically, and in this situation some reciprocal societies were founded: the Yugoslavian–Bulgarian League in Belgrade and the Bulgarian–Yugoslavian Society in Sofia. The initiatives of artistic exchange in that period were supported by these societies.[12] In December 1934, Georges Papazoff launched a solo exhibition in Zagreb. In Ljubljana, on the occasion of the exhibition (mainly of graphic art works) of the New Artists in 1936,[13] the critic of the *Jutro* (Morning) newspaper reminded the readers of V. Zahariev's graphic art. The list of exhibitions and participations of the Bulgarian artists in Belgrade and Zagreb, and to a lesser extent in Ljubljana, as well as that of artists from those cities in Sofia is a long one. Except for the officially organized exhibitions, financially supported by the state—as was the case with the *Exhibition of Seven Bulgarian Artists* in Belgrade in 1933—all the rest of the presentations showed mainly graphic prints and drawings.

The Second World War and the ideological crisis in the newly formed camp of communist states at the end of the 1940s brought about the break in the relationship between Bulgaria and Yugoslavia. In 1953, with the mutual

10 Andrey Protich, *Misul* 14.7 (1904): 392.

11 Mihaylo S. Petrov, *Pravda*, 26 September 1933.

12 Krustyo Manchev, *History of the Balkan Nations 1918–1945* (Sofia: Paradigma, 2000), 184.

13 On the artistic exchange with Belgrade, Zagreb, and Ljubljana in 1934–36, see Irina Genova, *Modernism And Modernity: Difficulties for Historicizing: Art of Bulgaria and Artistic Exchanges with the Balkans during the First Half of XX c* (Sofia: Ed. IDA–Krasimir Gandev, 2004), 177–211.

cooperation agreement between Yugoslavia, Greece, and Turkey, Yugoslavia temporarily got closer to the West. This agreement fell apart in 1956.[14] The relationships between Yugoslavia and the states from the Soviet Bloc, Bulgaria included, began to normalize in 1955 with Nikita Khrushchev's historic visit by train to Belgrade in May–June. However, Yugoslavia did not enter the Warsaw Pact and strived after an independent policy. Following Tito's initiative, it became one of the founding members of the Non-Aligned Nations Movement[15] in 1955.

For Bulgaria the artistic exchange with Yugoslavia became a fact at the beginning of the 1960s. In 1955, the Bulgarian graphic artist V. Zahariev (1894–1971) participated in the First International Biennial in Ljubljana; however, it was in 1963 that a large group of Bulgarian artists participated in the Biennial for the first time. In the 1960s, the former Yugoslavia maintained active contact and exchanges with Western Europe. For Bulgaria, on the contrary, such contact was for the most part limited to an exchange with communist countries.

As far as the limitations of artistic exchange are concerned, the graphic prints were very much an exception. Bulgarian artists and their graphic works successfully participated in a number of exhibitions in different cultural centers in Europe and the United States from the beginning of the 1920s into the 1930s.[16]

After the Second World War, Bulgarian artists presented graphic art works in the biennials in San Paolo (founded in 1951), and in specialized graphic arts biennials in Ljubljana (founded in 1955—the same year as documenta was founded in Kassel), Banska Bistritsa (a biennial for wood carving, founded in 1968), Krakow (founded in 1966), and Florence (from 1968 to 1978). The graphic arts biennial in Ljubljana was just one of many examples, but it was of great significance in the 1960s. The change in artistic problems after the war and the topicality of the abstract image generated more interest in the graphic print, and in the possibilities of the different graphic techniques in terms of color and texture. The number of the artists involved

14 Maurice Vaïsse, *Les relations internationales depuis 1945* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1990).

15 Manchev, *History of the Balkan Nations*, 220.

16 Irina Genova, "Vasil Zahariev and Bulgarian Graphic Arts Abroad between the Two World Wars," in *100 Years of Vasil Zahariev's Birth*, ed. Dimiter Balabanov (Sofia: DIOS, 2000), 46–57.

in graphic arts grew not only in Bulgaria but elsewhere, too. In Bulgaria at the end of the 1950s and during the 1960s graphic artists were defined professionally. In that period the focus on the specifics of graphic arts was to some extent a kind of protection against the ideological requirements for an expanded plot and illusory object, and space representation. Many of those who started their career as graphic artists later tried to break away from these types of restrictions.

Graphic prints in Bulgaria showed different form and style origins: one of those was decorativism, going through ornamental stylization—rhythm, symmetry, etc. Another one was linked to the experience of Western art (from the point of view of Bulgaria, Ljubljana, and Krakow were also to the West) in the multitude of abstract forms. Combining stylization methods, the artists looked for points of contact both in traditions—that were seen as national—and in the contemporary art of the West.

Graphic techniques lead to new surface qualities. Purely material prerequisites turn into an integrating factor of the artistic impact. In Bulgaria, this broad movement was not consistently thought of and theoreticized, but it happened in the artistic practice. Yet, figurative aspects were in one way or another always present in Bulgarian graphic arts.

Decorativism in Bulgaria, just as elsewhere in the "socialist camp," was manifested under the auspices of the declared tradition. Every time that, from the positions of the official ideology, doubts were cast over the realistic character of the graphic images, the critical discourse referred to the "democratic" and "national" traditions. In graphic prints—similar to popular arts, medieval book decoration, and the "Bulgarian National Revival"—line, color, and rhythm were more or less emancipated from nature; they were autonomous.[17]

Articles by Bulgarian critics pointed out that, because of the multistep creation of the printing cliché and the character of the print itself, the object-space and tonal modeling with color was not inherent in graphic arts (in contrast to painting and drawing). The graphic techniques, despite their differences, required the flatness of the color spot and of the composition as a whole, etc.

17 Maximilian Kirov, "National Features of Graphic Arts in the Exhibition (Exhibition of the Artists from Sofia '65)," *Izkustvo* 2 (1966): 17–23.

In this respect, in the best examples from the 1960s, the graphic technical executions and the materiality of the work were integrated in a complex overall artistic suggestion.[18] The artists and critics in Bulgaria from the 1960s showed an interest in the expressiveness and possibilities of the material. Some characteristic aspects of the modernisms were manifested in the graphic arts tendencies. The aspiration for the work was not to provide meaning and represent, but to create suggestions analogous to those of mountains, terrains, and bodies. Clement Greenberg wrote: "content is to be dissolved so completely into form that the work of art or literature cannot be reduced in whole or in part to anything not itself."[19] This inclination could be called an interest in the "material" abstract.[20]

Among the works that synchronized best with some international art milieus were the graphic prints by Todor Panayotov (1927–1989), Borislav Stoev (1927), and Rumen Skorchev (1932). Panayotov's graphic works attract with their aspect of nature's creations and geological forms with embedded memories. Landscapes and terrains, human figures and faces—concentrated, tense and at the same time seemingly permanent traces and layers in the prints—throw the viewer out of the conventions of everyday life. For Panayotov, as well as for other artists in the field of graphic arts, the act of creating the print turned into a study and transformation of the materiality, of the printing cliché and paper. The new surface qualities in the 1960s and developments in intaglio printing and lithography techniques, and the material peculiarities of the print itself generated new meanings and impact. The complexity of the print and the large scales were a common tendency in the international graphic arts biennials, which were on the increase in the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s. In the artist's archive we can see the notes he made on the catalog pages regarding his foreign colleagues' works.

The fast acquisition of more complex technological processes and the use of color began to be manifested in Bulgaria in exhibitions from 1962. The same year, Panayotov and Stoev presented color lithographs. In 1963, a large

18 Irina Genova, "On the Drawing and the Graphic Print from the 1960s," *Izkustvo* 2 (1988): 28–34.

19 Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," in *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961).

20 Arthur Danto opposed this form of the abstract, as discussed by Greenberg, to another kind, which he called "formal abstract," for example, in neoplasticism. A. C. Danto, *After the End of Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 72.

number of etchings were shown at a joint art exhibition in Sofia. The size of the graphic prints in the exhibition halls grew bigger.

On the international scene, at the Biennial in San Paolo, Panayotov received a diploma for *Head*, done with a litho-etching technique. He also participated in the international graphic arts biennials in Ljubljana (1963, 1967) and Krakow (1966, 1968). Stoev was a regular participant in the biennials in Ljubljana (1963, 1965, 1967) and Krakow (1966, 1968). Skorchev first appeared on the international scene a bit later, in 1969, and in 1970 he was awarded a gold medal at the Second International Graphic Arts Biennial in Florence.

The graphic art works of the above-mentioned artists from Bulgaria excluded mimetic representation, but not figurative representation. They seemed not to have felt the need to radicalize abstraction. In graphic art the impact of the gesture, of the body, the creation of the print as an object was different from that in painting. The creation of the matrix and the making of the print were analytical activities, divided in stages and abstracted as gestures from the surface, created as a result, of the graphic sheet.

In Panayotov's landscapes and "terrains," done as intaglio prints in 1965–66[21] (and later as series of variations), the print creates a texture, complex color spots, and intense forms (Plate 24.1 and Plate 24.2). The graphic work has a strong impact with its rhythm, with the deep black and dazzling white cuts, with the tension between the neutral sheet and the repeatedly corroded plate, which transforms the paper. His works show figurative elements, but the materiality of the prints has been abstracted from them. The eyes are tempted to get a close-up. The tactile sensations, caused by the color, spot and texture, lead us to become "optically unaware."[22] The dramaticism of the image lies in the relationship/clash of the positive/negative; in the harmony/juxtaposition of forms, lines, and colors; in the preservation/deletion of traces. There is no history, subject or detail that is susceptible to a verbal narrative. There is a clear horizon and substances reminding us of rocky surfaces and soil. Orange-red inks erupt like lava. It is not the object but the spot that matters,

21 Two of them, done as color etching and aquatint, were presented at the International Graphic Arts Biennial in Ljubljana in 1967, and another one at the International Graphic Arts Biennial in Krakow in 1968.

22 The term was used by Walter Benjamin in "The Work of Art in the Age of Technological Reproduction" (1936).

with its color, texture, and relations. The stimuli, as before, in the early works of the artist, boil down to impressions and states caused by the tangible reality, but they seem to have been mapped by the print in color, light, and tactility. "The graphic moment" turns into one of meaning.

Is the question of the essence of the print, of the figurative and the abstract, of materiality and meaning an aspect of the modernist paradigm? Are these problems universal, deprived of social and local dimensions? Is it sufficient to interpret Panayotov's works or those by any of the above-mentioned Bulgarian artists in the common European perspective, or in the cultural context of the society of that time in Bulgaria—communist/socialist? I am aware of the "dual" presence of the works—in the closed locality and in the open environment of the international biennials. Can we then consider a duality of meanings?

The modernist paradigm—transforming the form and the work's materiality itself into meaning—began to be perceived as conservative and even retrograde in Western Europe and the United States in the 1960s. In Bulgaria, as elsewhere in the "socialist camp," the study of one's own expressive means—of graphic or any other arts—at the end of the 1950s and 1960s, as mentioned at the beginning, had not only artistic but also political dimensions. However, the political aspect is situational, and today it is difficult to give an account of how and why the complication of the print techniques, the denial of the narrative, and the interest in abstraction were perceived as an emancipation from ideological power.[23] The missing art of the resistance was compensated for by universal and antinarrative images.

The founding of the International Graphic Arts Biennial in Varna in 1981 confirmed the role of this kind of forum in the contacts of the Bulgarian art milieu abroad during the early period of almost complete isolation. The Biennial in Varna became possible due to the contacts and long-standing experience of the Bulgarian artists from graphic arts biennials in Europe and elsewhere. Although it was a bit late with regard to the common interest in graphic arts, later than its peak, and away from the contacts between the al-

23 I cannot retain myself from recalling the famous lines of Jaroslav Hašek, the name of the political party founded by his character, the Good Soldier Švejk: "The Party of Moderate Progress within the Bounds of the Law." This expression became a folklore refrain in Bulgaria as well as a humorous explanation of any nonradical attempt at emancipation from the constraints of ideological dogma.

ternative art milieus in the communist countries, the Graphic Arts Biennial in Varna was the first and only forum in Bulgaria from the time of the rule of the Communist Party that presented a wide range of artistic tendencies and artists from Cuba to Japan, without proclaimed thematic and form and style restrictions.[24]

24 The other international forum from this period was the Engaged Painting Biennial in Sofia.

25

The Biennale der Ostseeländer: The GDR's Main International Arts Exhibition

Elke Neumann

Rostock's Kunsthalle, a 1969 building in the international style, has been preserved in almost all details until today and—as will be shown—can be seen as the most important representational remnant of the Biennale der Ostseeländer (Biennial of the neighboring countries of the Baltic Sea).

Kunsthalle Rostock owes its existence to this GDR international arts exhibition, which has temporarily also been called the Biennale der Ostseestaaten (Biennial of the neighboring states of the Baltic Sea). The exhibition was the cultural core of the Ostseewoche. Between 1965 "and 1989 it showed exhibits from all neighboring countries of the Baltic Sea. Themed "*Die Ostsee muss ein Meer des Friedens sein*" (The Baltic Sea has to be a sea of peace), the festival week (Ostseewoche) that had taken place since 1958 united cultural events as well as sports, sciences, and political activities and advertised international cooperation in the Baltic Sea area.

It is remarkable that although the Biennale der Ostseeländer has been cited repeatedly in recent research, there is hardly any connected research to be found. Existing material for this topic can be roughly divided into two parts. There is a very big stack of files from the archive of the Kunsthalle

Figure 25.1.
Hubert Link, Rostock, Opening Biennale der Ostseestaaten, July 1969, Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-H0706-0001-016.

Rostock, which is mainly held at the Archiv der Hansestadt Rostock (AHR) and at the Landesarchiv Mecklenburg-Vorpommern in Greifswald. The primary sources are very heterogeneous. Besides unpublished archive material there are a number of contemporary publications that focus on the political importance of the Ostseewoche. One example is the brochure *Ostsee—Meer des Friedens* by Gerhard Reintanz (1960). Other central sources are the catalogs of all thirteen *Biennalen*, which are accessible in original versions. Little research has been carried out using these materials regarding the Biennale der Ostseeländer, even though they have been used in part for a small number of essays on the Kunsthalle in *Ein Rückblick: 25 Jahre Kunsthalle Ros-*

tock from 1994.[1] They were also the basis for my own research in 2007 for the Magisterarbeit "Die Biennale der Ostseeländer in Rostock 1965–1969. Eine Rekonstruktion mit politischen Dimensionen."[2] This article scrutinizes the first three *Biennalen* and outlines their organizational and institutional structure. The reconstruction of the exhibition showed the possibilities that were hiding within this material and that will now be investigated for the doctoral dissertation with the title: "Art for Politics—Political Art? The Biennale der Ostseeländer—The GDR's Main International Arts Exhibition and Its Dimensions for External and Cultural Policy."

Considering the Baltic Sea as a connection—as the *Ostseewochen* between 1958 and 1974 did—the stretch of water connected seven countries: the GDR, Poland, the USSR, Finland, Sweden, Denmark, and the Federal Republic of Germany. However, during the Biennale der Ostseeländer these countries were also joined by Norway and Iceland, which was due to the strong connections between the Scandinavian countries.

The Baltic Sea neighbors represented different political concepts and forms of government; their borders were not only territorial but also of immense political importance. Because of the developments during the Cold War, postwar politics up until the late 1960s mainly focused on external policy. The dissociation of the political systems was increased by the Federal Republic's Hallstein Doctrine, which isolated the GDR politically for many years. Hence, in its early years the Biennale took place in a country, which for many of the participating states was actually nonexistent. On the other side the GDR increased its efforts to establish itself internationally and aim for friendly relations as a basis of future acknowledgement. Due to the worsening economic conditions in the GDR, it was especially difficult to maintain initial economic contacts with nonsocialist countries. This is why friendly relations in scientific and cultural fields grew more important. The Ostseewoche tried to offer several points of interest and to create links abroad through various cultural forms. However, it was not only the foreign political aims that were crucial; the importance for domestic policy cannot be underestimated. According to Lu Seegers:

1 Angela Hofmann, ed., *Ein Rückblick. 25 Jahre Kunsthalle Rostock. Bestandskatalog Malerei* (Rostock: Kunsthalle, 1994).

2 Elke Neumann, "Die Biennale der Ostseeländer in Rostock 1965–1969. Eine Rekonstruktion mit politischen Dimensionen" (Magisterarbeit, TU Berlin, Institut für Kunstwissenschaft, 2007).

> In addition to the general foreign policy goals of the Ostseewoche, its successful completion under the leadership of the SED not only consolidated the young republic, but also strengthened the general awareness of the GDR people of their state and the identification of the citizen with the "fatherland GDR."[3]

The Ostseewoche—and with it the Biennale—were important symbols for the achievements of the young socialist republic. Contemporarily, Rostock was beyond the cultural centers of the GDR. Still, the city offered all the necessary conditions for establishing an exhibition of this size. Rostock's development toward a major city following socialist ideals[4] and its infrastructural formation[5] offered an excellent framework for events during the Ostseewoche. In addition to strivings for external recognition, the theme of the Ostseewoche was the goal of peace in the Baltic Sea region. This peace policy was heavily promoted and—despite international skepticism toward the USSR and its political brother the GDR—it resonated with the Zeitgeist.

Of all the cultural events during the Ostseewoche, only the pop music festival and the theater festival in Rostock caught the public's eye, thanks to their size and internationality. The Biennale der Ostseeländer was the most important event for cultural exchange in the area of fine arts with the Baltic Sea neighbors.

Bildende Kunst an der Ostsee, the exhibition which has been part of the cultural program of the Ostseewoche since 1960, was the origin of the Biennale der Ostseeländer, which was opened for the first time in 1965. This international arts exhibition moved into the government's focus and was officially upgraded following a *Beschluss des Ministerrates* from 28 May 1964. It

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3 Lu Seegers, "Die Zukunft unserer Stadt ist bereits projektiert. Die 750-Jahrfeier Rostocks im Rahmen der Ostseewoche 1968," in *Inszenierte Einigkeit. Herrschaftsrepräsentationen in DDR-Städten*, ed. Adelheid von Saldern (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2003), 68.

4 Due to the law for the buildup of the GDR's cities and the capital Berlin (*Aufbaugesetz*) dating from 6 September 1950, Rostock received the status of *Aufbaugebiet* and with this came special support for rebuilding the city. The law "*Gesetz über die weitere Demokratisierung des Aufbaus und der Arbeitsweise der staatlichen Organe in den Ländern der DDR*" from 23 July 1952 marked the reformation of the GDR's five counties into fourteen boroughs. This made Rostock the capital of the corresponding borough.

5 The city's harbor was built as the country's only overseas port from 1957. This supported Rostock's growth and was not only accompanied by a reformation of domestic housing, but also by *Gesellschaftsbauten* as the restaurant Teepott (1968), the multipurpose hall Lütten Klein (1968) and the Kunsthalle (1969), the GDR's first newly built museum.

was supposed to grow by "1965 into a representative Biennial for realistic art of the neighboring states of the Baltic Sea with an international jury under the political and artistic responsibility of the Ministry of Culture and the organizational accountability of the borough."[6]

The targets set by the *Ministerratsbeschluss* for the conception of the Biennale der Ostseeländer can be summed up in three major points:

A representative international jury should work on the realization of the Biennale. It was an aim to present "all realistic movements from Baltic Sea countries" and the *Ministerrat* insisted on an appropriate spatial setting. The lack of adequate rooms in Rostock led to plans for the GDR's first newly built museum as early as 1964, following these targets.

Also, the parameter that an "international jury under the political and artistic responsibility of the Ministry for Culture" should work on the exhibition could be fulfilled. However, from today's perspective we cannot know whether the initial plan was to leave decisions about single exhibits to the members of the committee, as became the usual procedure in later years. The primary sources have not offered any explicit insight into this issue yet. Practically, during the first three *Biennalen* the choice of the exhibits was made by the members of the committee of each country, which gave them a great deal of freedom. This freedom to show artistic variety was practiced during all three *Biennalen*, even though the initial concept had a different objective. The July 1964 decision of the committee of the Biennale der Ostseeländer stated in Article 1: "The committee members are committed to acquiring the best artists to participate in the Biennial. The Biennial should become a central exhibition of the most interesting artworks, in particular of the realistic movements in the states around the Baltic Sea."[7]

The *Ministerrat's* decision also stated that it "ist Vorsorge zu treffen, die Biennale zu einer Ausstellung aller realistischen Strömungen in den Ostseeländern zu gestalten."[8] Following this, realistic movements were shown in all of the exhibitions, however they were not the only exhibits.

Comparing the Biennale to Dresden's Deutsche Kunstausstellung, it is clear that the former was less than half as big as the latter, even when taking

6 Beschluss des Ministerrates no. 16/16/64 (28 May 1964).
7 Hansestadt Rostock Archive Bestand 2.1.13.4 Band 157. Beschlussprotokoll Kühlungsborn (8 July 1964): 2.
8 Beschluss des Ministerrates no. 16/16/64 (28 May 1964).

Figure 25.2.
Tom Maercker, Kunsthalle Rostock.

the numbers of artists exhibited during the 1960s into consideration. Still, the Biennale der Ostseeländer showed artists and pieces of art that were never exhibited in Dresden. It displayed works from the *Ostblock* as well as from the capitalist countries neighboring the Baltic Sea, thus offering a unique view of contemporary art. Despite the predominant realism, the proven part of abstract pieces underlines the Biennale's special role. The collections curated by the participating countries brought a greater variety of art to Rostock than would have been tolerated by a national jury.

After a start with difficult surroundings and immense efforts in the rooms of the Kunsthistorisches Museum, the Biennale der Ostseeländer was soon moved and found a new home with international appeal in the newly opened Kunsthalle (1969).

Besides the spatial situation, the hosts were also looking for a professional approach in other areas. The high quality of the catalogs, which were difficult to produce, underlined the exhibition's importance. The invitations sent to the guests and the central role of the committee, which hosted representatives of each of the neighboring countries, complied with international conventions, even though the costs were immense. However, despite the inter-

national level of the exhibition, the Biennale only slowly gained appreciation and support from the neighboring countries' official institutions, which was mainly due to the political situation.

The year 1969, the opening year of Rostock's Kunsthalle, was a milestone in the exhibition's history. The spatial changes and the integration of the Biennale der Ostseeländer into an institution had been planned since 1964 and meant an important professionalization, which improved the exhibition's image. The influence on the collections should not be underestimated since the Kunsthalle being the GDR's first newly built museum raised interest even across borders. Moving into the Kunsthalle, a building dedicated to the Biennale, the exhibition overcame the status of being a *Sonderausstellung.* For example, the new building made it possible to show pieces of work by single artists in special exhibitions even after the Biennale.

Due to the large number of artists[9]—435—involved in the first three exhibitions until 1969, the central aspect of the artists' networking and the reception of single exhibits has not been researched extensively. One example of the artistic positions to be found at the Biennale der Ostseeländer and its connected political specialities is the artist Dieter Roth (1930–1998).

According to the catalog of the 3rd Biennale der Ostseestaaten*:* "Dieter Rot, born in Reykavik in 1930," contributed six graphics to Iceland's collection: *Fortsetzungsgeschichte* (1968), *Thomkinspatent* (1968), *Reliefbüste des Dichters* (1968), *Landschaft* (1968), *Sonnenuntergang* (1968), and *Insel* (1968). The description of the working techniques[10]—*Siebdruck und Kakao* (silkscreen and cacao), *Siebdruck und Schimmel* (silkscreen and mold), *Schokoladen-Grafik* (chocolate graphic), *Käse-Grafik* (cheese graphic) and *Wurst-Grafik* (sausage graphic)—do demand attention, however.

In the Federal Republic of Germany, the Hanover-born artist whose full name was Karl-Dietrich Roth did also take part in the 1969 documenta 4 in Kassel. He also won the *Kunstpreis* of the city of Iserlohn the same year. The controversial action and object artist was one of the most exciting figures in the Federal Republic's art scene in the late 1960s. Besides graphics and heaps (*Haufen*) from different kinds of material, he also made books and space in-

9 For the First Biennale, 174 artists handed in their work. For the Second Biennale, 128 artists found their way into the catalog. In 1969, 133 artists took part in the Third Biennale.

10 As stated in *Katalog 3. Biennale der Ostseestaaten* (1969).

stallations. Roth's graphic work, which was part of the Icelandic collection for Rostock, was "confiding" compared with other pieces of his—for example the thirty-seven cheese-filled suitcases, which were displayed in May 1969 during the *Staple Cheese (A Race)* exhibition in Eugenia Butler's Los Angeles gallery.

Still, Roth crossed borders and with the help of his work showed his unique artistic expression in the GDR. From Roth's involvement in the Third Biennale der Ostseeländer as part of his chosen home country Iceland's collection, it can be concluded that he was not primarily interested in the political message of the exhibition. He was not following the political left scene of West Germany's artists and still this exhibition in the GDR seemed to have held some appeal for him.

Especially during the first years, the Federal Republic of Germany did, of course, play a special role. Official artists' movements were under no circumstances to be encouraged to take part in the Biennale der Ostseeländer. Without exception, the representatives on the committee were artists who acted as friends of artists or groups of artists who were involved in the Biennale. Still, it was especially the attendance of artists from the Federal Republic that was of enormous importance and that was picked up by the media of the time.

> Ostsee-Zeitung: Which thoughts move an artist of the Federal Republic of Germany to get involved in the 3rd Biennale der Ostseestaaten? Carlo Schellemann: Twelve artists of the FRG are participating in this Biennial, all more or less part of the artists' group "tendenzen" and all of them see it as a personal commitment. Each of the twelve artists told me that they want to contribute their works to the Biennial as a part of the struggle for the acceptance of the German Democratic Republic.[11]

Competition with the Federal Republic of Germany mainly focused on direct rivalry between the Ostseewoche and the Kieler Woche, which as well as being an archetype was a constant rival. It was the establishment of a Biennale—in its form an exhibition with a long tradition and still unique for the GDR—that was remarkable. The same goes for comparisons with Kassel's

11 *Ostsee-Zeitung* 24 (7 May 1969): 7.

documenta, which took place for the first time in 1955 and which focused on exhibiting abstract painting from the 1920s and 1930s—Kassel was located rather at the periphery of the Federal Republic's art scene. The Biennale's organizers repeatedly feared West German imitators: "Im weiteren Verlauf des Gesprächs . . . erfuhren wir, dass die westdeutschen documenta-Veranstalter eine große 'Baltische Ausstellung' in Kiel vorbereiten, die eine Gegenausstellung zur Rostocker Biennale darstellt."[12]

As the GDR's biggest international exhibition, the Biennale der Ostseeländer became a point of contact for both cultural and external policy interests. For the East German artists, taking part in the Biennale der Ostseeländer was an award for staying true to cultural politics or for showing their artistic position and their sympathy for the GDR. The tension that lay within the exhibition showed especially in the search for unusual pieces that would grab attention and that would carry a completely new discourse across borders, like the works of Dieter Roth. Despite the organizers' explicitly articulated wish to exhibit realistic pieces of art, the tolerance that was proclaimed for the sake of external policy managed to build an openness for artistic positions that would not have been able to stand according to the positions of the GDR's cultural policy hardliners.

12 AHR Bestand 2.1.13.4 Band 108, "Bericht der Dienstreise des Kollegen Zimmermann nach Kopenhagen vom 27.2. bis 4.3. 1969."

26

Czechoslovakia at the Venice Biennale in the 1950s

Veronika Wolf

The international art exhibition, the Venice Biennale, which took place for the first time in 1895 in the Giardini of Venice, has since its inception developed into the most prestigious of cultural events, a gathering of not only important figures from the art world, but also from the world of politics and society in general. For more than a hundred years it has witnessed a whole range of world events, among them: the grand inaugural exhibition opened by the Italian royal couple (1895); visits by the twice-refused applicant to the Vienna Academy of Art, Adolf Hitler (1934); artists representing the fascist Slovak state exhibited in the Czechoslovak pavilion (1942); the nonparticipation of the Soviet Union and its satellite states during the Stalin dictatorship of the early 1950s; the student protests in 1968 with the shouts of "Burn all the pavilions!"; the introduction of awards for the best national pavilions (1938); the discontinuation of these awards (1970) and their reintroduction (1986). After this brief but very telling list of events, there can be no doubt of the fact that the oldest and currently most important exhibition of contemporary art from all corners of the world had and retains a very strong involvement in the cultural politics of individual coun-

tries (both those that exhibit and those that do not), as well as national and international politics in general.

The Czechoslovak Republic was established in 1918 after the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Officials and diplomats of the first government of President Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk fully realized the importance of presenting their new state on the international stage and made the decision to participate in the very next Venice Biennale, which was held in 1920. In 1926, Czech and Slovak art was exhibited in the country's national pavilion, whose construction was financed by the Czechoslovak government.[1] By the mid-1920s, there were only eight countries with their own pavilions in the Giardini (Belgium, Hungary, originally Bavaria but from 1912 Germany, Great Britain, France, the Netherlands, Russia, and Spain). All of the other countries displayed their art in the Central Pavilion.

Before World War II, the Czechoslovak functionalist pavilion built by the architect Otakar Novotný housed a wide range of artistic style, from traditional conservative works (e.g., Viktor Stretti and Jakub Obrovský), to those reflecting the modernist aesthetics inspired by the School of Paris (e.g., Emil Filla and Josef Čapek). The selection of works representing Czechoslovakia was meant to emphasize cultural connections with France and Western Europe. The communist takeover of the country in February 1948 resulted in cultural politics taking a completely different direction.

The opening of the Venice Biennale of 1948 showed only a subtle left-leaning national direction. Jiří Kotalík, in the foreword of the exhibition catalog, noted that in February of that year, Czechoslovakia had turned down the path of socialism, meaning that art would no longer be only for the elite of the country, but for every citizen. At the time, art democratization as a value remained only a part of the rhetoric, and in spite of these words, the artists represented were highly individualistic and had strong roots in modernism: Jan Zrzavý, František Gross, František Muzika, Josef Wagner, and Emil Filla. It seemed that the new political regime had very little influence on the selection of artists. All throughout 1948, internationally as well as domestically, official exhibits of works created in the socialist realist and avant-garde styles coexisted. Radical changes, however, were not long in coming.

1 After the breakup of Czechoslovakia in 1993, it remains the property of the Czech and Slovak Republics in a ratio of 2:1.

In April 1948, the Union of Czechoslovak Artists was established, unifying all other existing art organizations and becoming the single country-wide artistic organization. This union directed the jury responsible for selecting works for the Biennale. After two years of rather vague policies, the union began to impose a very hard line of cultural ideology, and the period between 1950 and 1952 represents an era of the strictest Stalinization of Czech and Slovak culture. This also applied to international exhibitions. While the instructions given during the years of the Nazi occupation during World War II were very clear and specific—the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia were only permitted to participate in those exhibitions in which the German Reich was participating[2]—during the communist dictatorship there were no such definitive instructions. This left state officials uncertain and wavering, which meant that they issued an official announcement of Czechoslovakia's participation in the Venice Biennale and then almost immediately reversed of a decision, twice in succession (1950 and 1952).

It is worth looking in more detail at exactly what took place behind the scenes leading up to the occasions when Czechoslovakia failed to participate. At the beginning of October 1949, officials of the Biennale sent the Czechoslovak legation in Rome an invitation to participate in the Twenty-fifth Venice Biennale set to open on 3 June 1950. The envoy finally responded in February 1950, writing that the invitation had been forwarded to the appropriate authorities and was awaiting a decision. There followed a long series of urgent telegrams from the Italian side, emphasizing the importance of an answer. The officials also contacted the Italian envoy in Prague to ask for assistance in obtaining a response. It was not until 24 March 1950 that the envoy in Rome sent a telegram announcing the participation of Czechoslovakia in the exhibition. The Biennale immediately requested a list of artists and their works with photographs for the catalog. This nevertheless did not happen. As a result of the delay on the Czechoslovak side, the catalog was sent to the printer without any information about the works of the Czech and Slovak artists. The Czechoslovak envoy assured the organizers that the country would participate in the exhibition. The biggest surprise, however, came on the exhibi-

2 Decision published by the Office of the Reich Protector, National Archive (NA), Prague, fond PMR, sig. P1681, No. 3777, No. 5.203/39/Ko.

tion's opening day, when a telegram arrived stating simply that Czechoslovakia was canceling its participation. Two weeks later a letter of explanation was sent, which included the sentence: "The Envoy, with regret, must inform the Biennale directors that the appropriate Czechoslovak authorities were unable to overcome in time all of the technical difficulties, which caused them to withdraw from this year's Biennale."[3]

This unusual behavior continued in the following year as well. Almost the identical situation repeated itself when the directors of the Biennale received no response from Czechoslovakia to their invitation to participate in the twenty-sixth exhibition. The country's decision-making process is illustrated in an internal memo from the Ministry of Information and Propaganda, dated 14 January 1952. Before any decision could be made, it was important to take into consideration the position of other communist countries as well as communist organizations in the West. Part of the memo stated that from the envoys of the People's Democracies, there had thus far been responses only from Warsaw, Sofia, and Bucharest, each stating that a decision had yet to be made. Referring to an article by Renato Guttuso[4] that appeared in the magazine *Rinascita* in November 1951, the author of the memo wrote: "The position of our Italian friends can be said to be that they welcome our participation in any national cultural event, because in this way we strengthen their position. In case of any obstacle on the part of the Italian government, it is always possible to use this situation in the leftist Italian daily political and propaganda press."[5]

After many urgent telegrams, finally on 1 March 1952, it was announced that the government had decided to participate in this international art exhibition. Architect Karel Stráník, then director of the Union of Czechoslovak Artists and an active promoter of socialist realism, was named commissioner of the pavilion. The result was a scene that looked very much like that of 1950. The organizers of the Biennale were pressing for com-

3 Archivio Storico delle Arti Contemporanee (ASAC), Venice, Fondo Archivio Storico, Serie Paesi, Buta n. 9, Letter dated 22 June 1950, sent by Ivan Gavora, press attaché of the Czechoslovak envoy in Rome, addressed to Rudolfo Pallucchini, general director of the Biennale, Venice.

4 Renato Guttoso, because of this demonstration of his leftist political orientation, had his figurative paintings displayed in a very extensive exhibit in Prague (immediately in 1954, and later in 1968, 1973, and 1979). In 1972, he was awarded the Lenin Prize for his work to strengthen peace between nations.

5 NA, fond MI-D, sig. 565, No 174, No 1506/52.

plete information about the artists and their works for the exhibition catalog. In spite of the delay from Prague in responding, a number of other factors seemed to indicate that Czechoslovakia this time had indeed decided to have its artists participate. In addition to the official announcement in March 1952, there is the fact that a list of artists and works of art destined for Venice was sent by express airmail to Italy on 3 May 1952, as shown by Stráník's telegram.[6] A further indication that they definitely were expecting the participation of Czechoslovakia is the inclusion of the nation's flag, along with those of all other participating countries, on the cover of the official catalog. The exhibition preparations were in their final stages when on 27 May 1952, the Biennale organizers received an unexpected telegram, stating: "It is with regret that we inform you, that due to serious technical difficulties, Czechoslovakia will not participate in this year's Biennale. Envoy of Czechoslovakia." What specific technical (or political?) difficulties could possibly be the problem could not be determined. Technical difficulties must be excluded as the reason, as in 1948, the pavilion underwent a complete—and not inexpensive—reconstruction.

This withdrawal led to yet another unpleasant incident. The Italian organizers responded with a telegram the next day, stating that while they regretted the absence of the Czechoslovak artists, they requested the use of the pavilion for a special exhibit. So that the pavilion would not remain closed to visitors, they proposed an installation of Italian and French divisionism, and would of course cover all expenses related to the maintenance of the pavilion for that period.[7] As there was no response from the Czechoslovak side, the Biennale directors decided, given the time constraints (the exhibition opened on 14 June) and an expected positive response, to complete the installation. Therefore, it was a very unpleasant surprise when a letter, dated 21 June 1952, arrived stating that Czechoslovakia had decided not to make its pavilion available. In response, the president of the Biennale, Giovanni Ponti, wrote a very apologetic letter to the Czechoslovak envoy in Rome, explaining in detail why the organizers decided to allow the use of the Czechoslovak pavilion.

6 ASAC. Telegram dated 2 May 1952, sent by Karel Stráník, commissioner of the Czechoslovak pavilion, Prague, addressed to Rodolfo Pallucchini, general director of the Biennale, Venice.

7 There was reference to Paragraph 14 of the general rules of the exhibition, which, among other things, stated that during the exhibition, all spaces of the Biennale must be put to the fullest and best use.

Ponti showed the extent of his diplomatic skills and obtained the grudgingly given agreement of the Consul.[8]

In March 1953, Josef Stalin died, and two weeks later the first communist president of Czechoslovakia, Klement Gottwald, also died. During that year and the following year, critical voices were heard very high up in the regime, criticizing the overly dogmatic following of socialist realism, saying that artists have the right to some degree of individualism. A certain rehabilitation of a few artists from the older generation also occurred. There was a new appreciation for those who used their canvases to capture the beauty of the Czech countryside and the life of farmers, even though the same artists had previously been criticized for working for bourgeois society.

These changes were also immediately reflected in the 1954 Venice Biennale, when Czechoslovakia and two other countries in the Soviet sphere of influence (Romania and Poland) participated.[9] The exhibition at the Czechoslovak pavilion was a reflection of what the politicians considered to be good art. Canvases from the earlier generation of artists (e.g., Ludvík Kuba and Václav Rabas) mostly predated World War II and came from the postimpressionist tradition. A notable example was the almost ninety-year-old Kuba, whose impressionistic light was lovely and beautiful to look at, but more importantly, politically harmless. Because of his style, he was able to exhibit and be appreciated by the fascist and communist regimes. Both dictatorships had in common the desire for art to evoke a feeling of optimism in the viewer, and these light-filled paintings succeeded in doing so. At the Twenty-seventh Biennale, paintings belonged to the category of retrospective (excluding graphic works), while sculpture was in line with the official art doctrine. It is important to note that while painters had difficulty in adjusting to the requirements of socialist realism, sculptors—thanks to the strong realistic tradition of the nineteenth century—were less uncertain. The sculptures displayed were completely within the artistic and aesthetic parameters prescribed by the Communist Party: truthful representations like those of the nineteenth century, but with

8 It is important to note that in past years when a country did not participate, the pavilion was used, if not outright offered, for the installation of retrospective and national exhibitions.

9 In 1950, none of the communist countries participated in the Venice exhibition, and in 1952, only Poland came. Tito's Yugoslavia falls into a special category, as in the late 1940s he managed to remain outside Stalin's influence. This meant that they took part in all Venice exhibitions from 1950 until 1990 and promoted abstract art very early on.

leftist subject matter. This is illustrated even in the titles of the works themselves: *Mine Worker*, *Cooperative Member*, *Bricklayer*, *Brotherhood*, or *Lenin*, by the sculptors Kozák, Kostka, Malejovský, Pokorný, and Lauda, respectively. In the foreword of the catalog of artists, pavilion commissioner Miroslav Míčko wrote that older, deserving artists were selected, those who "did not stray from reality, their native land and its people, even when Czech and Slovak art was removed from society and used in a crisis of subjectivity and formalism."[10] This sounds like a harsh criticism of the avant-garde artists of the pre- and interwar years, who strongly resonated in the earlier art scene. The rest of the art of the younger generation followed the main tendency of contemporary art: socialist realism. Míčko emphasized that while there was one philosophy for artists, there was enough room for individual expression. Visitors to the pavilion must have doubted his words in relation to individual expression, but there was no doubt about the one ideological path. A completely different reality greeted them at the other national pavilions, where they were showing very contemporary works by Francis Bacon, Lucian Freud, or Paul Klee. The majority of the Italian press commented that the socialist realist works were limited to describing something completely devoid of any intellect, leaving them unable to compare them with European contemporary art.[11] Naturally, the Italian leftist press had the opposite opinion. *L'Unità*, at that time the official daily of the Italian Communist Party, gave a long praise to the contents of the Venice pavilions of the People's Democracies, stating that their artists created works "directly serving people, art that is clear, simple, and folk art that helps man build a better society."[12]

Preparations for the next Venice Biennale were also preceded by completely unexpected political events. At the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union held in February 1956, the party's first secretary, Nikita Khrushchev, openly criticized the practices of his predecessor in a secret speech entitled "On the Personality Cult and Its Consequences," which de facto was the beginning of the process of de-Stalinization. This new situ-

10 Catalog of the *XXVII Biennale* (Venice: 1954): 268.

11 "L'arte del buco alla XXVII Biennale," *Orsa Maggiore*, 26 September 1954; "La XXVII Biennale di Venezia," *Arte figurativa antica e moderna* (May–June 1954).

12 This article so pleased the Czechoslovak government that it was translated and reprinted in the local art magazine. Mario de Micheli, "Artists from the People's Republics at the XXVII Biennale," *Vytvarná práce II* 16–17 (1954): 6.

Figure 26.1.
Josef Kostka, *Cooperator*, bronze, 1952. Venice Biennale, 1954.

Figure 26.2.
Cyril Bouda, *Illustrations for* Gulliver's Travels *by Jonathan Swift*, pencil, 1951. Venice Biennale, 1956.

ation immediately affected the Twenty-eighth Venice Biennale, in which the Soviet Union participated following a twenty-two-year absence. Of the satellite states, present again were Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Romania. Miroslav Míčko was again named commissioner of the pavilion, and for the first time, a deputy commissioner was also appointed. This was Vlastimil Rada, a painter whose works were among those chosen for the Czechoslovak pavilion in 1956. Rada belonged to the older generation of artists, and was not new to Venice, as his works showing the beauty of the Czech countryside were presented at the Biennale of 1930, 1934, 1938, and 1940. Again, a few of the statues that appeared were of a political nature, but in comparison with years past, it was less noticeable and they could not be categorized as purely socialist realism. What widely attracted attention because of the themes, forms, and artistic quality, all of which are recognized even today, was the selection of works hanging on the wall. In place of canvases, there was an extensive collection of book illustrations, which in 1950s Czechoslovakia was a very seriously regarded medium, on par with painting and sculpture. Turning their

artistic talents to children's book illustrations was one way for many gifted artists to express themselves while avoiding themes required by the regime. Because of the superior works created in the field, these illustrations caught the attention of viewers, even in Venice. Illustrations by Antonín Pelc for the book *Jacques Vingtras: L'Insurgé* by Jules Vallès were awarded the prize for graphic works, which also included a monetary award of 100,000 lira.[13] Because of the selection of book illustrations for fairy tales and works of world literature (for example: *Gulliver's Travels* by Jonathan Swift, *Penguin Island* by Anatole France, *Eugene Onegin* by Alexander Pushkin, and *Good Soldier Švejk* by Jaroslav Hašek), the works of art in the Czechoslovak pavilion were able to move outside of the narrow limits dictated by the existing political situation in the country. Though it was still too soon for a bold move away from the communist government's rigid dictates, the book illustrations were an elegant solution to escape from having to produce propaganda art.

In 1958, Czechoslovakia won the Grand Prix and thirteen other awards at Expo 58 in Brussels , which was the first major world's fair to be held since the end of WWII. During the preparations for the exhibition, there was a certain cultural liberalization, with the state granting artists a degree of freedom. The international success that followed was a great awakening for many Czechs and Slovaks and marked a turning point from which there was no going back to the artistic and aesthetic values from earlier in the decade. The Czechoslovak Expo 58 pavilion, whose architectural structure was rooted in the Czech avant-garde tradition, included an abstract stained glass panel by Jan Kotík.[14] The nascent freedom did not apply completely to the Venice Biennale: works selected for the exhibition continued to be much more conservative. In fact, the first abstract painting to be seen in the Czechoslovak pavilion did not appear until 1964, and by coincidence it was also a work by Jan Kotík.[15] While on the surface the regime was still moving in the old direction, there were small steps taking the country away from

13 Graphic works also received awards at the Biennale in 1958. One went to Vincent Hložník, who was awarded the prize of the David E. Brigit Foundation in Los Angeles for a graphic artist under forty-five years old along with 100,000 lira, and Ernest Zmeták, whose work *Flight into Egypt* was given a special award for art with a religious theme by the International Institute for Liturgical Art, along with 200,000 lira.

14 The architects of the pavilion were František Cubr, Josef Hrubý, and Zdeněk Pokorný.

15 An exhibition of Kotík's work from 1948 to 1956, which took place in the spring of 1957 in Prague, was one of the first exhibitions of nonfigurative art since 1948, and it caused quite a sensation in the press of the day.

the dark period of the early 1950s. These evolutions were generally invisible to the public, but the organizations working behind the scenes were indeed reflecting these coming changes.

In 1958, art historian Jiří Kotalík was the commissioner of the pavilion, and he fulfilled his function very professionally and responsibly.[16] Gone were the maneuvers and behavior characteristics of the beginning of the decade. Proof of this improved atmosphere of cooperation is that the general director of the Venice Biennale, Gian Alberto Dell'Acqua, personally intervened with the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to expedite the issuance of a visa to Kotalík. The biggest news of this Biennale, however, was the granting of permission for five of the exhibiting artists to travel to Venice to study contemporary art.[17] Commissioner Kotalík even requested that the organizers arrange for invitations to the opening and all social events for the artists. As regards the selection of works themselves, 1958 was a hybrid year, with works celebrating socialist working people (Kostka and Klimo), the interwar avant-garde (Zrzavý and Wagner), and contemporary tendencies (Černý and Jiroudek). Completely surprising was the exhibition of two woodcuts with religious themes: *Flight into Egypt* by Ernest Zmeták and *The Flood* by Orest Dubay. The choice was unexpected because in communist Czechoslovakia any religious expression or demonstration of faith was strongly repressed, and the church and its representatives suffered to varying degrees.

In 1960, the successful cooperation between the organizers of the Venice exhibition and the reappointed commissioner Jiří Kotalík continued. Four painters and four graphic artists (no sculptors) were selected by the jury of the Union of Czechoslovak Artists as the best representatives of the then current tendencies in Czech and Slovak art. Even though overtly leftist propaganda works were in decline in the pavilion, the overall selection of works was bland and boring. The exhibited works did not offend, but neither did they excite any interest, and even less so because of the growing international competition. Even the Italian press was not interested, commenting only

16 Jiří Kotalík (1920–1996) was an associate professor at Charles University in Prague and was later rector at the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague. Kotalík is primarily known for his long tenure (thirty-three years, from 1967 to 1990) as director of the National Gallery in Prague.

17 The grand opening was attended by Bohumír Dvorský (painter), František Jiroudek (painter), and Jozef Kostka (sculptor). In September, the exhibition was visited by Karel Černý (painter) and Josef Malejovský (sculptor).

twice during the whole exhibition on the Czechoslovak pavilion, and then in negative terms.[18]

The Venice Biennale, as an important international art exhibition, was strongly influenced by political pressures, each country's understanding of its own national cultural identity, and the desire of participating nation states to project an accurate image of themselves to the rest of the world. This all contributes to the notion that the history of the twentieth century could only be written through a careful analysis of this exhibition. Political events played an increasingly prominent role at the Venice Biennale, always mirroring the state of affairs at the domestic and international levels. The events of the 1950s are a perfect example of this. During Stalinism, Czechoslovakia suddenly cancelled its participation (1950 and 1952). In 1953, the Soviet and Czechoslovak leaders died, and the following year, the country participated. In February 1956, Khrushchev criticized the cult of personality of his predecessor; and in May of that year, the Venetian public viewed the work of Soviet artists with great curiosity while the Czechoslovak artists were escaping into book illustrations. In 1958, several Czech and Slovak artists were allowed to travel to Venice to study contemporary art, something that a few years earlier had been unimaginable. Looking at political changes through the lens of what was happening at the Venice Biennale could also continue into the subsequent decade. Dramatic changes at the Czechoslovak pavilion did not occur until 1964, when after several years of exhibiting works by mediocre artists, good-quality and thoroughly contemporary works, including abstracts by the previously mentioned Jan Kotík, were presented. In the same year, only a few months later, the Union of Czechoslovak Artists was finally able to change its leadership; in this case, the selection of artists had anticipated imminent changes. This change was a direct result of the new era of liberalization within the communist regime, which culminated in the Prague Spring in 1968. Other similar examples can be found in more recent history, and not just in the case of Czechoslovakia. The Venice Biennale must be understood not only as a contemporary art exhibition, but also as an event that has paralleled major turning points in world history.

18 "I padiglioni stranieri," *Nostro tempo IX* 74 (1960); "Scultura italiana e nazioni straniere," *Il Gazzettino*, 30 August 1960.

27

"Biennale of Dissent" (1977): Nonconformist Art from the USSR in Venice

Jan May

In 2007, the Esti Kunstimuuseum in Tallinn, Estonia, held the exhibition *Archives in Translation: Biennale of Dissent '77*, which was a spin-off of the festival held in Venice in 1977, dedicated to the cultural dissidence in Eastern Europe. Conferences, seminars, concerts, exhibitions, and film sessions were held to determine the position of dissidents in the Eastern Bloc countries in those days. This year, 1977—sixty years after the Russian Revolution—was the moment when the topics of dissidence and human rights were most prominent on the East–West axis due to the Helsinki Accords. From the very first days, the "Biennale of Dissent" became a problem for both foreign and domestic policy force fields. Today, those tensions are as fascinating as the festival itself.

The purpose of this text is to examine the artistic and political relations between nonconformist artists in the USSR and the Western world through the Iron Curtain. Some institutions were, and still are, very active in the research in this field. The Norton and Nancy Dodge Collection of Soviet Nonconformist Art was amassed by an economics professor from the University of Maryland, Norton Dodge (1927–2011), from the late 1950s until the

advent of perestroika. The collection comprises roughly 20,000 works of art and is housed at the Zimmerli Museum of Rutgers University, in New Jersey, USA. The Dodges published a very important work with interviews of Soviet dissident artists.[1] After 1990 the Russian State Museums began to take part in exhibiting these artists.[2] The latest attempt was the exhibition *Total Enlightenment: Conceptual Art in Moscow, 1960–1990*, at Schirn Kunsthalle in Frankfurt am Main.

In recent decades our knowledge of nonconformist art from the USSR has improved thanks to various artists, galerists, art critics, and curators all over Western Europe and the United States. In the following short text, I want to focus on the exhibitions held in France, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, and the United States between the late 1950s and the late 1970s. The research in this field has increased in volume over the last twenty years and many books, catalogs, and articles have been published, providing a wide overview of this historical period. From my perspective of research about the history of the Venice Biennale, I will try to give a general overview of the international network of people and institutions that have made this art popular in the West.

In the first part, the official art exhibitions and the participation of the USSR in the Venice Biennale will be examined. Furthermore, I will name some important exhibitions that made a first look inside the heterogeneous nonconformist art world possible. The second part focuses on the situation in Moscow in the early 1970s by explaining some crucial events like the "Bulldozer Exhibition" in September 1974 and its consequences for the participating artists and the international knowledge of this suppression. The third part shows the consequences of the emigration to Western Europe of some important collectors, such as Alexander Glezer. Dozens of exhibitions took place in Western Europe and made this art more and more popular. The most important fourth part focuses on the exhibition *La Nuova Arte Sovietica. Una prospettiva non ufficiale*, which was part of the Venetian "Biennale of Dissent" in November and December 1977. The "Biennale of Dissent" was one of the most discussed cultural events of that year. The last part will ex-

1 See Alla Rosenfeld, ed., *Nonconformist Art: The Soviet Experience 1956–1986* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995), and Renee Baigell and Matthew Baigell, *Soviet Dissident Artists: Interviews after Perestroika* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995).

2 Yevgenia Petrova, ed., *Times of Change: Art in the Soviet Union, 1960–1985* (St. Petersburg: Palace Editions, 2006).

plain the consequences of the Venetian experience, which culminated in the boycott of the following biennials by the countries of the Warsaw Pact in 1978 and 1980.

The most important regular stage for the foreign exhibition politics of the USSR in Western Europe was the Venice Biennale. Since 1914, when the Russian empire built its own pavilion, Russian art had been part of this important international exhibition series.[3] Following regular participation in the 1920s and early 1930s, the USSR did not return to Venice until 1956 with its official art, socialist realism.[4] In 1956, the Soviet pavilion opened its doors for the first time since 1934. What was at stake politically with the Soviet presence seemed to be obvious in the context of the Cold War, while the reasons for their joining the event certainly had to do with the domestic political context of the time. Yet the artists who were selected did not meet the expectations: Soviet realism was still topical, and most critics were disappointed with what the Soviet artists had to offer, which was deemed to be outdated. "What the Russians showed officially in Venice in the mid-1960s—in the end, it made no difference whether this came from the Soviet Union or from the National Socialists; sometimes the left hand was raised, sometimes the right."[5] The presence of the USSR clearly showed a determination to confront foreign art, but it also revealed that artistic innovations had bypassed the nation. It denied any link to the Russian avant-garde, which was an essential part of modernity. After the death of Stalin in 1953, some had seen an opportunity to open up the rigid exhibition policies, but 1 December 1962 was a critical, fatal moment for fine arts. On this day, Nikita Khrushchev paid a visit to a large retrospective exhibition dedicated to the thirtieth anniversa-

3 Matteo Bertelè, "L'inaugurazione del padiglione russo all'Esposizione internazionale d'arte di Venezia del 1914," *Archivio Russo-Italiano* 5 (2009): 97–108.

4 See Vivian Endicott Barnett, "Russian Presence in the Venice Biennale," in *The Great Utopia: The Russian and Soviet Avant-Garde, 1915–1932* (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, State Tretiakov Gallery, State Russian Museum, Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt, 1992), 466–73. Marylène Malbert, "Le retour de l'URSS à la Biennale de Venise en 1956," *Histoire de l'art. Art, pouvoir et politique* 55 (2004): 119–29; Larissa Salmina, *URSS: l'arte sovietica alla XXXI Biennale Internazionale d'Arte di Venezia. Venezia, giugno–ottobre 1962* (Venice, 1962); M. Lamac, "I giovani pittori di Mosca," *La Biennale di Venezia* (Venice, 1962), 18–25.

5 "Was die Russen auf der Biennale in Venedig Mitte der 60er Jahre offiziell zeigten—letztlich war es doch egal, ob das nun aus der Sowjetunion oder von den Nationalsozialisten kam; hier war die linke, dort die rechte Hand erhoben" (Kenda Bar-Gera). Quotation in Hans-Peter Riese, ed., *Nonkonformisten. Die zweite russische Avantgarde 1955–1988. Sammlung Bar-Gera* (Cologne: Wienand Verlag, 1996), 69.

ry of the Moscow Union of Artists, where new tendencies of artistic work were presented as a natural outcome of the processes of liberalization.[6] But Khrushchev pronounced a political verdict on the works of new culture—either by renouncing or supporting them—and resorted to diplomatic ploy, to a compromise: he simply declared them to be private psycho-pathological distortions of the public conscience. This event marked the beginning of the ever-increasing domestic isolation of independent artists; they were consistently denied the right to show their works to the public in any place or form. Every mention of them disappeared from the Soviet press, as if their art were tacitly declared not to exist. For this reason, this date can justifiably be seen as the birthdate of nonconformist art. Over the entire period of its existence, clinical metaphors were key terms in describing its unregulated, nonformalized relations with the authorities. The *Moscow Diary* in 1973 by Jindřich Chalupecký recounted the living and working conditions of some of these artists.[7]

The only way of knowing anything about these artists in the West were reports from journalists or emigrated artists. Armed with information from Czechoslovakian art historians, some Italians—such as Enrico Crispolti—curated exhibitions and carried out research into this phenomenon. As early as 1967, some works from the Alexander Glezer Collection were shown at the Il Segno Gallery in Rome (including Vêctomov, Kabakov, Kalinin, Masterkova, Nemuchin, Plavinski, Rabin, Sooster, and Yankilevski).[8] Some popularity was enjoyed by the Dvizhenie (Movement) group around Ernst Neizvestny, whose art was one of synthesis, uniting elements such as form, color, light, sound, rhythm and movement.[9] They were also exhibited in 1968 at documenta 4 in Kassel and had group exhibitions in New York, Hofheim and London. In the following year the Pananti Gallery in Florence exhibited

6 John Berger, "The Unofficial Russians," *The Sunday Times*, 6 November 1966, 48; Helen Ssachanon and Manfred von Grunert, *Sowjetische Kulturpolitik seit 1965* (Munich: DTV, 1970). Andrei Erofeev, *Non-Official Art: Soviet Artists of the 1960s* (Roseville East, NSW, Australia: Craftsman House, 1995); *(Non)conform: Russian and Soviet Art 1958–1995: The Ludwig Collection* (Munich/Berlin/London/New York: Prestel, 1995).

7 *Opus International*, Special Issue, no. 4 (1967); Jiri Padrta, "Neue Kunst in Moskau," *Das Kunstwerk* 7–8 (April–May 1967): 3–18; Jindřich Chalupecký, "Moscow Diary," *Studio International* 2 (1973): 81–96; Jane Nicholson, "La nouvelle gauche à Moscou," *L'art vivant* 23 (1971): 5.

8 *Quindici giovani pittori moscoviti* (Rome: Galleria Il Segno, 1967).

9 See John Berger, *Art and Revolution: Ernst Neizvestny and the Role of the Artist in the U.S.S.R.* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1969).

Nuova scuola di Mosca. In 1970, an exhibition was held at the Gmurzynska Gallery in Cologne and also the very important exhibition, *Nuove correnti a Mosca* (involving fifty-eight artists), at the Museum of Fine Arts in Lugano. In 1973, the Russian avant-garde could be seen in the Dina Vierni Gallery in Paris (Bulatov, Kabakov, Rabin, and Yankilevski). Finally, two museums in West Germany organized the important exhibitions *Russische Kunst der Gegenwart*, *Grafiken der Avantgarde* at Museum am Ostwall, Dortmund, and *Progressive Strömungen in Moskau 1957–1970* at Museum Bochum. Peter Spielmann and Arsén Pohribny gave an excellent overview of the situation of art in the USSR. The art came exclusively from collections and galleries in Western Europe: Kenda Bargera, Gmurzynska Gallery (Cologne), Johanna Riccard (Nuremberg), Fondazione PRINAF (Florence and Milan), Il Segno Gallery (Rome), Lambert Gallery (Paris) and Dina Vierny Gallery (Paris).

Meanwhile, in the USSR there was a transformation of underground art into a generally recognized cultural trend, an alternative to the official art. Even though severely censured and criticized, a time came during the mid-1970s when the first legalized exhibitions took place and a kind of shadow union of nonofficial artists, known as the Graphics Moscow City Committee, was formed. In this situation there remained only one thing for artists to do: openly proclaim their existence even under the threat of arrest.

The most important event for the international press was the "Bulldozer Exhibition" in 1974.[10] This was a crucial event for future developments. On 15 September 1974, a group of artists marched out onto a vacant lot in Moscow to show their works. This first free open-air exhibition was wrecked by the authorities with bulldozers and firehoses. Plainclothes policemen burned paintings on the spot, and some of the people present, including foreign correspondents, were physically attacked. This exhibition, however, was a turning point in the development of Soviet unofficial art. Because of the bulldozers, the artists' opposition movement in the USSR became the focus of attention of the Western press; encouraged by this support, the participants resolved to continue their struggle for the right to exhibit their works.[11] The West German

10 See Alexander Glezer, *Kunst gegen Bulldozer. Memoiren eines russischen Sammlers* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1982).

11 K. Ren, "The Russians Smash an Exhibition of Contemporary Art with Bulldozers," *New York Times*, 16 September 1974; H. Smith, "5 Russians . . . ," *New York Times*, 17 September 1974; "Auf dem Acker," *Der Spiegel* 39, 23 September 1974, 82; "Soviet Union: Art v. Politics," *Time*, 30 September 1974.

journalist Fritz Pleitgen was the first to film the new art in Moscow and to broadcast this on television. Astonishingly, as a consequence the authorities decided to backtrack and made a compromise. Shortly after the "Bulldozer Exhibition," the first sanctioned nonofficial art exhibition took place in Izmailovo Park in Moscow on 29 September 1974. It was open for four hours with 250 works by seventy artists in a variety of contemporary styles, including abstract, surrealist, impressionist, and Pop, and had about 30,000 visitors. "You see, miracles do happen in the Soviet Union," said a bearded, beaming Moscow painter. "We have had four hours of freedom here this afternoon," exulted another artist.

> All of this has been expressly forbidden to Soviet artists, who are supposed to hew to the woodenly representational standards of socialist realism. As might be expected, the quality of the art was less an issue than the unique opportunity to show it. Some canvases were quite obviously done by laissez-faire Sunday amateurs, while others displayed a disciplined professionalism. In any case, the success of the show has already had its impact on other Soviet artists. A group of iconoclastic Moscow poets are talking about asking for permission to hold a public outdoor reading of their proscribed verse.[12]

This exhibition was followed by several others in Moscow and Leningrad. What is more, in 1976 the Moscow Municipal Committee of Graphic Artists organized a "painting section." "No matter how strange it may sound," as twenty highly placed KGB officers declared in the period of glasnost, "it was our stand, which in the final account played a noticeable role in the formation of the Section of Painting at the United Committee of Graphic Artists."[13] This refers to the fact that after a large, and highly symbolic, error that met with a negative reaction worldwide—the bulldozer attack on a nonofficial art exhibition and the burning of what was left of it in September 1974—the authorities at last decided to regulate and legalize their relationship with nonconformist artists. This was entrusted to the most flexible and pragmatic of Soviet structures—that is, to the State Committee for Security, or the KGB.

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12 "Soviet Union: The Russian Woodstock," *Time Magazine* (14 October 1974).

13 See V. Vlasov, A. Mikhailov, and N. Kovalyov, "Are You Ashamed Now, Colonel Karpovich?" *Ogonyok* 34 (August 1989): 25.

As an important consequence of this policy, many artists, critics, and others had to emigrate. Very important for developments was the exile of two individuals: the publisher and collector Alexander Glezer and the art historian Igor Golomshtok. Glezer extensively described how it was possible for him to leave the USSR with a large number of paintings.[14]

From their exile in Paris, Glezer and Golomshtok started a crusade with their collections. It started in the Künstlerhaus in Vienna (22 February–2 March 1975),[15] Braunschweig (11 May–22 June),[16] Freiburg (17 October–16 November), and Kunstamt Berlin-Charlottenburg (7 November–5 December). On 24 January 1976, Alexander Glezer opened the Russian Museum in Exile at Montgeron near Paris. Lew Nusberg was one of the most famous of these émigré artists.[17]

Between 1975 and 1977, the Alexander Glezer Collection dominated the view of unofficial art from the USSR in Western Europe. But at the same time, many other institutions also continued to show different aspects and artists. "The major surprise in an exposition of contemporary—and denounced—Soviet painting now being shown at the Palais des Congrès in Paris is how comfortably the persecuted painters of Moscow and Leningrad fit in the various currents of modern art."[18]

For the USSR, the year 1977 was a crucial moment in its history. The celebration of the sixtieth anniversary of the Russian Revolution encouraged the USSR to organize many exhibitions. The Glezer Collection was shown in London and there were several books published on this phenomenon.[19]

The work on organizing the "Biennale of Dissent" started in January 1977.[20] Directly after the first discussion about this subject, the Russian

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14 Thomas Schröder, "Aus Moskau verjagt: Bilder im Exil," *Die Zeit* 12, 14 March 1975, 15.

15 See Hilde Spiel, "Russischer Februar 75. Achtzig Gemälde nonkonformistischer Künstler der Sammlung Gleser im Wiener Künstlerhaus ausgestellt," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 24 February 1975, 15;Otto F. Beer, "Mit 80 Bildern in den Westen. Alexander Gleser zeigt in Wien 'nonkonformistische Russen,'" *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 26 February 1975, 38.

16 Alexander Glezer, ed., *Nonkonformistische russische Maler* (Kunstverein Braunschweig, 1975).

17 "Erleuchtung durch die Doldenblüte. Jürgen Hohmeyer über den emigrierten Sowjet-Künstler Lew Nusberg," *Der Spiegel* 51, 13 December 1976, 174.

18 Flora Lewis, "Anti-Soviet Art Shown in Paris," *New York Times*, 24 November 1976, 22.

19 See *Unofficial Art from the Soviet Union* (London: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1977); Igor Golomshtok and Alexander Glezer, *Soviet Art in Exile* (New York: Random House, 1977).

20 For further information, see G. C., "La nuova arte sovietica: una prospettiva non ufficiale," in *Annuario 1978. Eventi del 1976–77* (Venezia), 542–46, and "Fahren Sie heim," *Der Spiegel* 12, 14 March 1977, 128.

newspaper *Izvestia* published an article accusing the president of the Biennale, Carlo Ripa di Meana, of opposing the work of the Helsinki Accords. On 3 March the Soviet ambassador, Nikita Ryschow, declared in the name of all countries of the Warsaw Pact that if the Italian government did not put a stop to the "Biennale of Dissent," all these countries would boycott the exhibitions and festivals in 1978.

The Italian Communist Party (PCI) had to protest for the first time in its existence against the Soviet influence in its own country. "As a result of pure extortion," the right-wing Roman newspaper *Il Tempo* expressed in outrage. Meanwhile, the Italian foreign minister, Arnaldo Forlani of the Democrazia Cristiana (DC), declared that the government had no competence over cultural things. To demonstrate against this "dictate from Moscow," the socialist president of the Biennale, Carlo Ripa di Meana, left his post.[21] The PCI—with more than 12 million electors the second-largest political party in the country at that time, and with a strong presence in the cultural sector—had to declare where it stood. Aldo Tortorella, responsible for the culture politics of the PCI, asked that the Biennale continue its work with full autonomy: "Any foreign interference is inadmissible." The whole program had been accepted by the nineteen-head advisory committee unanimously and five communists were among its members.

Two years earlier the agitation for a democratic Spain had been welcomed by the PCI, but the "dissent in the Eastern Bloc" was uncomfortable for them. Many Italian communists feared that exhibitions, festivals, and discussions under the heading "Dissent" would transform the 1977 Biennale into a tribunal against the Eastern rulers and thus against their comrades' parties, despite the fact that President Ripa di Meana stated that "[t]his is not a crusade against the Soviet system." It was also hoped that the event would document the internal contradictions of the dissidents. The new Roman mayor (elected by the PCI) and art professor Giulio Carlo Argan stated that the Venetian exhibition should become a "Solzhenitsyn parade." The subject, according to Argan, was senseless, because "the whole of modern art—and this goes for capitalist countries—is an expression of dissent against the political system."

21 See his own description of this story: Carlo Ripa di Meana and Gabriella Mecucci, *L'ordine di Mosca. Fermate la Biennale del Dissenso. Una storia mai raccontata* (Roma: Liberal Edizioni, 2007).

In addition, the most explosive political documents would be distributed, including "The Two Thousand Words" manifesto written by Czech reformist writer Ludvík Vaculík as well as "Charter 77"; films were to be shown, including those by the Czech Miloš Forman and Pole Roman Polanski; stage plays of the CSSR dissidents Václav Havel and Pavel Kohout were to be put on. Wolf Biermann was to sing. An essential part of this program was an exhibition of nonconformist art from the USSR. The reaction of the USSR caused the PCI to enter the discussion. Because of its support of freedom of speech, pluralism, and the right of cultural autonomy—most recently affirmed by General Secretary General Enrico Berlinguer at a Eurocommunist summit in Madrid in 1977—the party defended the Biennale program against the Soviet *nyet*. "It has never happened before," said ex-Biennale president Ripa di Meana, "that the PCI has asked the DC government to be more firm toward the USSR."[22]

Five PCI parliamentarians demanded precise information about how the government had reacted "to the step taken by the Soviet ambassador." At the same time, Representative Giovanni Berlinguer, a brother of the Communist Party boss, wrote in the party sheet *Unitá* a comment about the Biennale which began with eulogies of the "anti-fascist, peaceful Soviet Union" and ended with the wish to consider the whole artistic reality of the USSR in the Venetian exhibition.

To avoid any provocation, many institutions did not let exhibition space to the "Biennale of Dissent" events. In Venice, so rich in venues, it was suddenly difficult to secure rooms. Neither the RAI gave its OK to the use of Palazzo Labia, nor did the Fondazione Cini give permission for the use of the island of San Giorgio, and nor did the president of Ca'Foscari allow the use of the facilities of the Venetian university. So the exhibition had to take place in an unusual location—the Arsenal's Palazzetto dello Sport—an ugly concrete building from the late 1960s. The exhibition *La nuova arte sovietica. Una prospettiva non ufficiale* finally opened on 15 November. However, about 300 works of sixty artists (half of them living in the USSR) illustrate the difficulties of the dissidents. It offered a vast documentation of the figurative arts in the USSR from the beginning of the 1960s to 1977, and it presented

22 "Fahren Sie heim," 128.

the works of dissident artists without distinguishing between residents of the USSR and those who had emigrated.

Around the 1950s, socialist realism was given little support. There arose, in its place, the desire to experiment with new solutions in the artistic domain and to follow the example set by Western avant-garde movements much earlier. The exhibition isolated a number of precise sectors corresponding to those already established by Western art. Thus, it was possible to use formulas already employed by art historians.

For the Soviet news agency TASS, the Biennale was a "dirty farce"; with its subject of "cultural dissent," its focus was on politics, not on art. Many criticized the show for its emphasis on politics for having a lack of artistic substance. However, "this Biennale may not be judged purely aesthetically; what counts here," claimed the Venetian museum manager Guido Perocco, "is the historical and political moment."

In contrast to the exhibitions in London and Washington, which were based on the collection of Alexander Glezer, in Venice there was a wider view of this phenomenon. There was also photographic material collected by Ilaria Bignamini.[23] The collection of Alexander Glezer had been on quite an extensive European tour, so the show had hardly offered anything new for experts. The sculptures by Neizvestny were shown at the same time in Schloß Morsbroich in Leverkusen. Included were Nusberg kinetic space draughts and typefaces by Erik Bulatow.

The audience visited the sports palace in droves, and large numbers also visited a Czechoslovakian graphic arts show and an exhibition of unlawful books and samizdat manuscripts. A piece of scrap material meant more than many words: a piece of cloth, which was smuggled from a Soviet camp.[24] Mostly the critics wrote about the political situation and not about the art.[25]

In the same year the USSR tried to take advantage of the positive opinion of its artistic tradition by organizing huge exhibitions in the United States. The exhibition *Russian and Soviet Painting*, for example, was pre-

23 See Ilaria Bignamini, "From the U.S.S.R.—Dall'U.R.S.S.," *Flash Art* 76/77 (July-August 1977): 9–19.

24 "Redender Fetzen," *Der Spiegel* 49, 29 November 1977, 243.

25 Ina Lee Selden, "Dissent Is Hallmark of Venice Biennale; Plagued by Problems," *New York Times*, 16 November 1977, 24; Leslie D. Bruning, "Venice Biennale 1977: Politics Italian Style," *Art in America*, 6 June 1978, 12–13, and Gottfried Knapp, "Es gibt eine russische Avantgarde. . . . Doch niemand will sie haben. Die Dissens-Biennale in Venedig," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 25 November 1977, 16.

sented in New York City and San Francisco in the sixtieth year after the Russian Revolution.

Like Glezer, many artists emigrated from the USSR in the following years.[26] Oskar Rabin left for Paris. The situation for artists who emigrated to the West was somewhat similar to what they experienced in the USSR. When the exhibition *20 Jahre unabhängige Kunst aus der Sowjetunion* was organized by Peter Spielmann and Hans-Peter Riese in Bochum in 1978, Alexander Glezer did not cooperate with them.[27] The parallel existence of a Russian artistic life in the USSR and in the West continued until the period of glasnost under Mikhail Gorbachev.

As a reaction to the events of that year, the USSR, Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia boycotted the Biennale in 1978; only Romania exhibited.[28] In 1980, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland returned. In 1982, after six years, the USSR returned to Venice and continued participating in the following years; the commissioner, Vladimir Goriainov, showed mostly unknown official artists. In 1988, he showed the work of avant-garde artist Aristarch Lentulov (1882–1943).[29] Still, official participation did not reflect the actual situation. By this time the art market had begun to focus on nonconformist art; even Sotheby's held a major auction in Moscow. In 1990, twenty-six years after the famous exhibition in Venice, the group exhibition *Rauschenberg to Us, We to Rauschenberg* finally let the Russian artists return officially to the international art world—albeit only briefly.[30] In 1993 a nonconformist artist finally appeared in the Russian pavilion: *The Red Pavilion* by Ilya Kabakov, in which the fenced-off pavilion of the Russian Federation was filled with abandoned scaffolding and empty paint cans while a small, brightly painted hut located at the back of the pavilion played loud, Soviet-

26 Marilyn Rueschemeyer, Igor Golomshtok, and Janet Kennedy, *Soviet Émigré Artists: Life and Work in the USSR and the United States* (Armonk, NY/London: M.E. Sharpe, 1985), and Paul R. Jolles, *Memento aus Moskau. Begegnungen mit inoffiziellen Künstlern 1978–1997* (Cologne: Wienand Verlag, 1997).

27 Hans-Peter Riese and Peter Spielmann, eds., *20 Jahre unabhängige Kunst aus der Sowjetunion* (Museum Bochum, 1978).

28 See Albert Wucher, "Politische Planspiele hinter den Kulissen der Biennale. Die umstrittene 'Solschenizyn-Schau' soll allenfalls 1978 nachgeholt warden," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 1977, 29; Peter von Becker, "Venedigs Biennale bleibt vorerst autonom. Mehr Geld und konzeptionelle Probleme. Dissidenten-Ausstellung im Frühjahr 1978?" *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 1977, 12; Hans Klaus Jungheinrich, "Vom Schaustück zum Seminar. Ein Rückblick auf die Dissens-Biennale in Venedig," *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 1978, 17.

29 See "USSR," *XLIII Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte. La Biennale di Venezia* (Venice, 1988), 282–83.

30 See "USSR," *XLIV Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte. La Biennale di Venezia* (Venice, 1990), 230–37.

style music.[31] In 1995, the Russian Federation tried to give a representative view of artistic life.[32]

In 2007, many celebrated the thirtieth anniversary of the "Biennale of Dissent." It was a crucial point where Eastern reality met still-existing Western illusions. Sixty years after the Russian Revolution, the USSR had lost control over its artists. Emigration was not a solution for the artistic situation in the USSR. As I have shown, there had been many other exhibitions of nonconformist art, but showing this on the Venetian stage was a different thing. Venice was, and is today, an important place for foreign cultural politics. The boycott of the biennials of 1978 and 1980 had shown the strong link between art and politics. Showing a first insight into the international network of artists, gallery owners, curators, collectors, and art critics could only be the beginning. This text can give only a short introduction to this subject. There is still a lot of work to be done. The research of Matteo Bertelé and Sandra Frimmel belong to an extensive project of the Swiss Institute for Art Research in Zurich under the supervision of Beat Wyss from Karlsruhe. In a comparative perspective the scholars Kinga Bódi (Hungary), Jörg Scheller (Poland), Veronika Wolf (Czechoslovakia), Daria Ghiu (Romania), and Karolina Jeftic (Yugoslavia) are publishing studies about the participation in Venice of the different socialist countries.[33]

31 Sandra Frimmel, "Kak pokazyvat' Rossiju v Venecii," *Artchronika* 1 (2003): 22–29.

32 Sandra Frimmel, "Der russische Pavillon auf der Biennale di Venezia 1995: auf der Suche nach einem repräsentativen Bild der aktuellen russischen Kunst," in *Kursschwankungen: russische Kunst im Wertesystem der europäischen Moderne*, ed. Ada Raev and Isabel Wünsche (Berlin: Lukas Verlag, 2007), 172–80.

33 In 2013, Daria Ghiu curated an exhibition at the transit.ro art space in Bucharest with a focus on the history of the Romanian Pavilion—with documents.

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Correcting the Czech(oslovakian) Error: The Cooperation of Hungarian and Czechoslovakian Artists in the Face of the Warsaw Pact Invasion of Czechoslovakia

Magdalena Radomska

The crucial notion organizing the memory of 1968 in Czechoslovakia of the outstanding writer Milan Kundera was the declaration of love received by him from the officer of the occupying forces on the third day of the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia. "They all spoke more or less as he did, their attitude based not on the sadistic pleasure of the ravisher but on quite a different archetype: unrequited love. Why do these Czechs (whom we love so!) refuse to live with us the way we live? What a pity we're forced to use tanks to teach them what it means to love!"[1] The lesson received by Czechs and Slovaks along with all the countries of the Eastern Bloc was not exclusively of a historical, but also of a linguistic nature. Sixteen years later, on the pages of his philosophical account of the communist past, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, Kundera answered: "love means renouncing strength."[2]

Not more than four years after the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia—from 26 to 27 August 1972—Hungarian artists initiated in the Bala-

1 M. Kundera, *Kubuś i jego Pan. Hołd w trzech aktach dla Denisa Diderota* (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 2000), 8.

2 M. Kundera, *Nieznośna lekkość bytu* (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1996), 85.

tonboglár Chapel the merger of Hungarian and Czechoslovakian artists. The chapel, run by György Galántai from 1970 to 1973, was the most important venue for events and exhibitions of the Hungarian avant-garde.

The para-artistic action, organized by Hungarian art historian and critic László Beke, was the essential carrier of discussion on the intellectual and cultural community of East-Central Europe. Two weeks previously in the chapel, the exhibition of the Yugoslavian group Bosch + Bosch (László Kerekes, Slavko Matkovic, Predrag Sidjanin, László Szalma, and Bálint Szombathy) had taken place. Difficulties in organizing the exhibition had symptomatically portended the twisted policy restricting "fraternal cooperation," which afflicted many of Galántai's initiatives. However, because of the political situation, projects involving Yugoslavia called for particular precautions—Galántai's proposal faced disapproval on the basis of the conviction that the coordination of international exhibitions was the domain of the state organs.[3]

The Hungarian–Czechoslovakian artistic event was semantically placed on the other, painfully tensed, nerve of the communist world—the 1968 invasion. The Balatonboglár actions were neither unprecedented nor of extraordinary artistic quality. As early as 1968, Tamás Szentjóby created two of the most important works alluding to the political events—*Czechoslovakian Radio* and *Portable Trench for Three Persons.* László Lakner's work, *The Wounded Knife*, was very apt, and in 1969 László Méhes conceived the interesting series *Shaving Mirror for 6.80.* The chapel actions were essential as a result of the cooperation between Hungarian and Czechoslovakian artists. Moreover, they were among few artistic actions inspired by the invasion as—according to Piotr Piotrowski—exclusively the Hungarian artists in East-Central Europe expressed their solidarity with Czechoslovakia.[4]

Opposite the entrance door, Beke placed, on the surface of three walls, sets of Czech, Slovak, and Hungarian words in an attempt to learn the Slovak language. Symbolically, it constituted the cultural autonomy of Slovakia by significant resignation from his own language (Hungarian) as a possible (and the easiest) tool of communication between Slovak and Hungarian artists. Giving up the claim of one's own language in favor of universality de-

3 Chapel Exhibitions at Balatonboglár, 1972, http://www.artpool.hu/boglar/1972/chron072.html.

4 Piotr Piotrowski, *Awangarda w cieniu Jałty. Sztuka w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej w latach 1945–1989* (Poznań: Dom Wydawniczy Rebis, 2005), 222.

fined communication as the essential negotiation of meanings based on differences that were impossible to evade. This action created a utopian horizon of understanding—a language pact against a common enemy.

Moreover, the art historian juxtaposed words similar in tone and meaning—implying the moral integrity of the conquered. The operation constituted the field of investigation directed toward the similarities rather than the differences, and it made a strong suggestion that the crucial disparity existed exclusively between the discipliner and the disciplined.

The majority of notions enabled merely the negative definition of the community in relation to the captivating ideology. Entries such as "bureaucracy," "terror," "conservative," "repressive," "repression," "tolerance," "individualism," "information," "document," "passive," "provocation," and "spy" carried weight because of their relativism; their meanings oscillate between the official—defined by the ideology—and the unofficial. Others, such as "emigration," "illusion," "glass," "prisoner," "hell," "bug," and "officer," were words whose real, multidimensional meanings were reserved exclusively for victims. Some entries served as a thread—the forcible recollection of the fact that notions such as "paragraph," "reaction," "demonstration," "action," "coordination," "spark," "gale," "street," and "cobblestone" still remained in the dictionary of enslaved nations. This part of the installation recalled the dictionary of 1968, in which the entry "cobblestone" had earlier (in 1971) been assigned by Beke as the subject of artistic investigation for a group of artists.

The notion of "Jew," present on the wall among others, needs to be analyzed within the context of 1968. Moreover, it serves as a figure of the "small nation's fate," coined by Milan Kundera. The nation, which—according to Kundera—reflects and concentrates the fate of Central Europe, operating as the main cosmopolitan element integrating Central Europe and its intellectual joint.[5] "Who are the Jews, if not the small nation *par excellence*?" asks Kundera in "The Stolen West or The Tragedy of Central Europe,"[6] claiming that "the small nation is the one whose existence can be called into question at any moment, which can disappear and knows about it."[7] There-

5 M. Kundera, "Zachód porwany albo tragedia Europy Środkowej," http://www.milankundera.webpark.pl/MILAN_KUNDERA.htm.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

fore, beyond all differences, discord, and factors of isolation, Central Europe exists as a fate.[8]

Certain words placed on the chapel walls referred directly to these discords. "Tank" and "ruffle" alluded to this part of the history of 1968, which linked Hungary and Czechoslovakia in shameful events during the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia. Thus, four years later, Beke took the risk of revising the dictionary's entries, which—under the aegis of the totalitarian discourse—had seemed untranslatable in a considerable search for the common roots of communist Europe.

Although Beke's initiative was one of the most important attempts to define the character of the interrelations in this part of Europe—which had escaped the totalitarian definitions—his interpretation was characterized by the similar utopia. The basis of this utopia of understanding—which required neither translation nor a negotiation of notions—was a strong belief in the existence of common values and of the crucial notion of the enemy. Rooted in moral affinity, the understanding thus defined had a status of simple opposition to the totalitarian gesture, however—on the strength of the same mechanism.

The construction of the art historian, reflecting his desire to create the file of universally valid meanings, resembles the anecdote—told by Gyula Pauer—which was an apt diagnosis of the universalism of the totalitarian regime reflected by the obligatory presence of the Russian language in the education program of communist Europe. Pauer testified that the Russian taught in schools, mediated with philosophical and economical notions, appeared useless in everyday situations. During their trip to Moscow, Pauer and his friends were simply unable to order anything to eat or drink.

The spinning device was considered by Marx of no significance before it was incorporated into the ideological and economical structure—afterward it could function as capital. Significantly, it reflects the Marxist relation to language. Practice was of no relevance; the structure was the decisive factor for the semantics. Similarly, the structure created by Beke is characterized by the parallel power of establishing common meanings—shared but not vernacular, disregarding practice and history.

8 Ibid.

During the same year, the most important discussion on totalitarian language was created. *Moral Algebra: Solidarity Action*, with text by Hungarian artist Miklós Erdély, is the most apt intellectual proposal of a theoretical depiction of the idea of cooperation. Written in 1972 on the occasion of Erdély's exhibition at the Foksal Gallery in Warsaw, the text defines the logic of the massacre, according to which the extermination of mankind is possible in thirty-two moves.[9] The artist takes over the logic and thus, by reversing it, constructs the "logic of solidarity" based on the principle of indicating two individuals who can be warned "without using any institutional or communicational means."[10] The seemingly utopian text of Erdély marks one of the crucial points in his œuvre, in which the artist develops a notion of power that is strikingly similar to the Foucauldian model. However, Erdély characterizes power as decentralized and dissipated—within the context of his life in the totalitarian regime. "The similarity between the prisoner and the warder," claims the artist, "is greater than between the warder and the prison, or between the prisoner and captivity."[11] Thus, the "moral algebra" invalidates the binary structure of oppositional notions—a useful tool of the totalitarian regime.

Nevertheless, during the meeting in the chapel, Beke conducted another project of crucial historical importance. The action, during which the art historian used a propaganda documentary photograph, was found by Beke in a Western magazine[12] and showed Hungarian soldiers leaving the invaded Czechoslovakia. It was designed as an act of apology by the Hungarians to the Czechoslovakian nation. The photograph depicted two groups of soldiers pulling on a nonexistent rope, against a background of tanks.

The scene was acted out by Hungarian and Czechoslovakian artists and the composition of the picture was repeated faithfully. The very repetition had the psychoanalytical function of freeing people from the traumatic experience and was thus polemical toward the main tendency (the attempt to

9 M. Erdély, "Moral algebra, Solidarity action," in *Elhallgatott Holocaust, Bisterdo Holocaust, The Hidden Holocaust*, ed. J. Fabényi (Budapest: Mucsarnok, 2004), 157.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 László Beke refers to the fact in J. Klaniczay and E. Sasvári, eds., *Törvénytelen avantgárd. Galántai György balatonoglári Kápolnaműterme 1970–1973* (Budapest: Artpool-Balassi, 2003), 141.

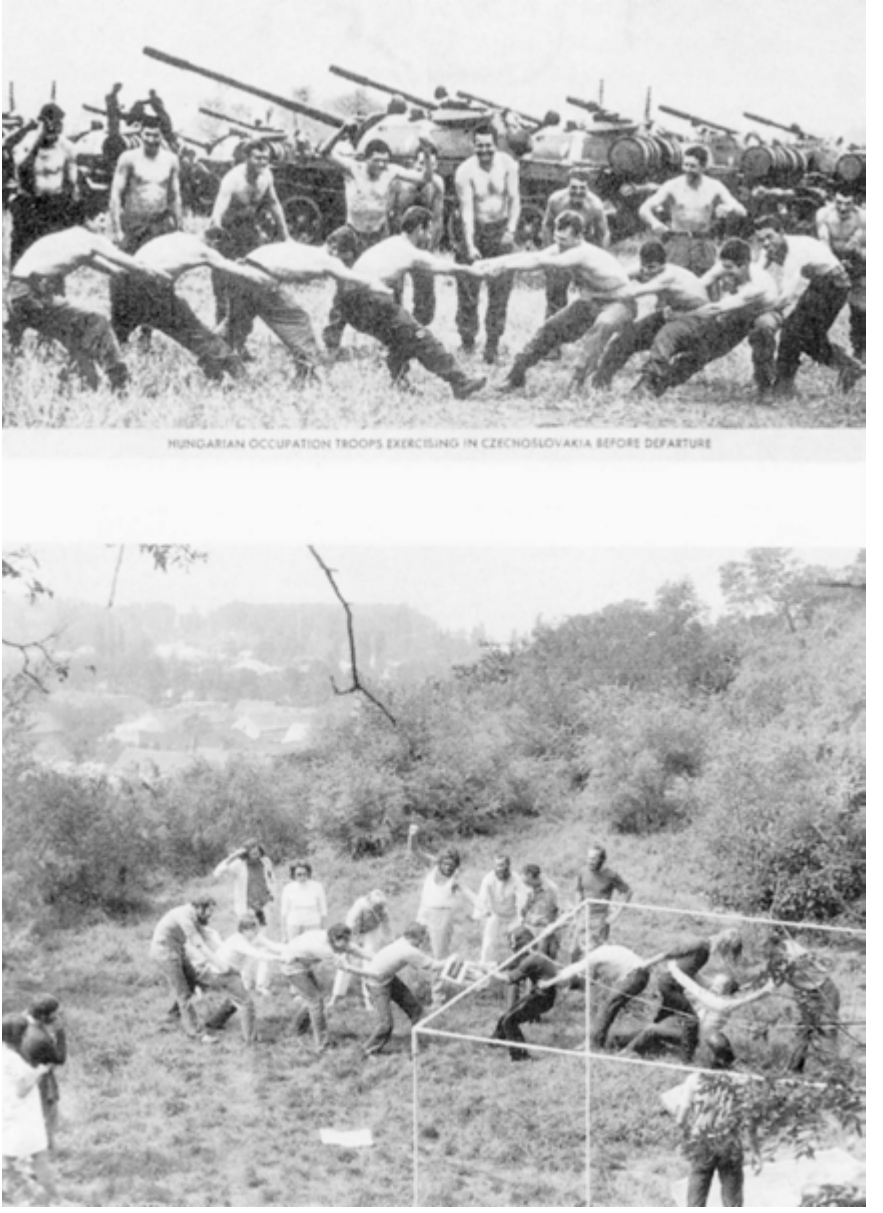

Figure 28.1.
László Beke, *Spotkanie czeskich, słowackich i węgierskich artystów (akcja 'ściskania rąk')*, Balatonboglár Chapel, 1972. Artpool Research Center in Budapest, courtesy of Júlia Klaniczay and György Galántai.

forget August 1968). Hungarian society—as Slobodan Stanković claims—was determined to forget August 1968.[13]

The process was complex and rooted in the early 1960s when, according to the detailed study by Charles András, the official diplomatic relations between Hungary and Czechoslovakia started to improve.[14] The foundation of the process was laid by two visits—the first, paid to Hungary by the general secretary and the president of Czechoslovakia, Antonín Novotný, in 1964, and the other by János Kádár and the Hungarian prime minister, Jenő Fock, in December 1967. The latter focused on bilateral economic cooperation. According to András, Czechoslovakia was the second most important economic partner of Hungary, while Hungary came fourth on the list of Czechoslovakia. Therefore, if Beke's action constituted the restoration of the previously repressed memory of the invasion, the invasion itself could be interpreted as a repression of the initial similarity of both countries. Moreover, the process of strengthening ties between the countries resulted in the spring of 1968 in the attempt to consider claims of the Hungarian minority in Czechoslovakia, parallel to Hungary's recognition of Slovak autonomy.

Thus, the action of pulling the rope, acted out by artists, recalled the problem of the movable border between Hungary and Czechoslovakia—not convergent in geographical and linguistic aspects—that had been abused by the totalitarian regime and used against Hungary in 1956 and against Czechoslovakia in 1968.

In Balatonboglár, two groups of artists facing each other, seemingly competing, were linked with the propaganda picture of Hungarian troops. Therefore, pulling the invisible rope in opposite directions, they were in fact cooperating in tearing the picture apart. Representing the shameful chapter in the history of both countries, the photograph was described by Beke as "quasi-magical."[15] Although Beke's penchant for universalism led him to characterize the event as the "picture within the picture situation,"[16] the psychoanalytical discourse—"metarepression"—seems to be more commensurate with the historical reality.

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13 S. Stanković, "Hungarians Would Like to Forget August 1968, Yugoslav Journalist Claims," http://files.osa.ceu.hu/holdings/300/8/3/text/112-1-284.shtml.

14 C. András, "Neighbours on the Danube," http://www.osa.ceu.hu/files/holdings/300/8/3/text_da/33-5-1.shtml.

15 Beke, *Törvénytelen avantgárd*, 141.

16 Ibid.

The Balatonboglár event was crowned by the third and most direct action of shaking hands performed between every member of the Czechoslovakian and Hungarian groups of artists. Both groups consisted of the most significant artists of the time. The Hungarian group included Imre Bak, Péter Legéndy, László Méhes, Gyula Pauer, Tamás Szentjóby, Péter Halász, Béla Hap, Ágnes Háy, Péter Türk, György Jovánovics, Gyula Gulyás, Miklós Erdély, and László Beke; and the Czechoslovakian group included Vladjimir Popović, Petr Štembera, Rudolf Sikora with his wife, Jiří Valoch, Gindl, Jiří H. Kocman, Peter Bartoš, Stano Filko with his wife, and the wife of Tamáš Pospiszyl.

The individual handshakes were photographed and organized by Jenő Boriszov in the kind of table used to calculate the distance between geographical spots, in which the distance can be found in the intersection of the geographical names placed both vertically (names of Czechoslovakian artists) and horizontally (names of Hungarian artists). The visual matrix showed the relevance of both the notion of distance and the idea of approach. It constituted the symbolic apology and reconciliation conducted on a personal level. As Gyula Pauer said on behalf of the Hungarian artists: "we have reconciled and that was essential."[17] The work was therefore a peculiar rank-and-file action of solidarity—the intellectual construction of Miklós Erdély. The joined hands recalled the motive used extensively in 1848 as the symbol of fraternity.[18] The project realized in practice the slogan justifying the Warsaw Pact invasion, namely "fraternal support."

Artists participating in the event represented a specific age group—most of them were studying in the period between the political occurrences of 1956 and 1968. Some were engaged in revolutionary acts. Fifteen-year-old György Galántai prepared the posters for the demonstrations, which had consequences for his career as he was refused acceptance to the art school. The oldest among the participants was Miklós Erdély, born in 1928, who, as a student of architecture, organized the action *Unguarded Money* in 1956, which was recognized as the first Hungarian happening. The money collected by the artist on the streets of Budapest was left unguarded, thus demonstrating that revolutionary Budapest was a space of social trust. A significant proportion

17 Ibid.

18 The motive is present on the plinth in the picture created as a project for the competition for the symbolic representation of the Second Republic by Ange Louis Jane Lange.

of the participants were born between 1939 and 1944: 1939 (Bak, Jovánovics, and Popović), 1941 (Pauer and Galántai), 1943 (Türk), and 1944 (Beke, Méhes and Szentjóby). Stano Filko was slightly older (1937). The youngest were Petr Štembera (1945), Péter Halász, Jiří Valoch, and Rudolf Sikora (1946), Péter Legéndy (1948), and Ágnes Háy (1952).

Thus, the act of shaking hands served for the group of intellectuals made up of students as the reconfirmation of the reliable Hungarian–Czechoslovakian student bond, strengthened by numerous historical facts.[19]

The space of the Balatonboglár Chapel defined by Beke provided a room for the artistic dialogue of both groups of artists. Most of the exhibited works extended the idea of cooperation by applying the discourse of mail art. *Stamp Activity Love* by Jiří H. Kocman, *Telegram* by Endre Tót, or *Envelopes* by Imre Bak characterized the space of the dialogue in geographical terms.

The crucial example of such an interpretation was *Telegram*, a work by Endre Tót, created in the series of mail art works sent to the West through Yugoslavia. It reads: "I write to you because you are there, I am here." The essential division in the "here" of the sender/artist and the "there" of the recipient determines both the autotelic and the political meaning of the work. This is the directly formulated information concerning the Wall's existence sent to Western Europe. And although the destination is reached—the mail crossed the geographical border of censorship—the aim still cannot be reached. The language appears to be the strictest censor—the telegram's communication remains illegible because it is formulated in Hungarian.

Thus, the incessant translation manifests itself as the inalienable component of international cooperation, both in terms of the signifiers and signified, which are not universal, but shaped by social, historical, and geographical factors. In terms of meaning, the event in the chapel was determined by such communication—the artists did not share a language—despite the fact that they had all been taught Russian. They communicated in the process of translation using some English and some of their own languages. There was no universal language that came to the rescue. There had been no semantic field of negotiated meanings, as the historical reality had proved.

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19 Jerome Karabel "The Revolt of The Intellectuals: The Origins of The Prague Spring and The Politics of Reform Communism." IRLE Working Paper No. 20-90, 1990, http://irle.berkeley.edu/workingpapers/20-90.pdf.

The forcible example of the work recognizing this shortcoming would be the project of the action by Péter Halász, which was not executed—probably due to the striking resemblance with the proposal of Beke. Halász was the founder of the experimental theater, established in Budapest in 1969, later known as Squat and banned six months before the end of January 1972. This resulted in 1976 in the group leaving the country with one-way immigration documents.

The project of Halász would enable us to define this cooperation as being based on the essential lack of certainty of the shared dictionary or common field of meanings, founded exclusively on trust and the essential difference. Artists would shake hands in the space of the chapel, blindfolded; this would force them to find their way to each other using the spoken language as their tool. Moreover, the action—unlike the executed version of Beke—would create the possibility of handshakes among the members of national groups, indicating national divisions as the result of the events of 1968. Such an event would establish an interesting link with Erdély's action of 1956 and Szentjóby's *Expulsion-Exercise, Punishment-Preventive Autotherapy*—the action realized during the *Direct Week*, at the beginning of July 1972. It was probably the most significant action conducted within the Hungarian art scene in terms of defining the space of the creation as appropriated, nerved with various discourses of power. The artist was sitting in the chapel with a bucket on his head allowing visitors to ask him politically related questions, despite being aware that the chapel was under surveillance. Szentjóby thus interpreted this communication as the process of interrogation based on both risk and trust.

During the *Direct Week*, Péter Legéndy exhibited the work of art *Plum Dumplings*, which was shown at the Hungarian–Czechoslovakian exhibition as well. Alluding to the invasion of Czechoslovakia, the work used the ready-made container of fruit-filled dumplings on which one of the photographed dumplings had been replaced by a three-dimensional dumpling. The work, equipped with the manifesto propagating the dumpling as the "measure of our safety," replaces the hard bullets of political facts with the soft ammunition of the dish descended from Czech cuisine and spread over the borders by means of customs, entertainment, and invitation, polemic toward the political geography of the present, pointing to an alternative one, disregarding the boundaries created by censorship and restrictions.

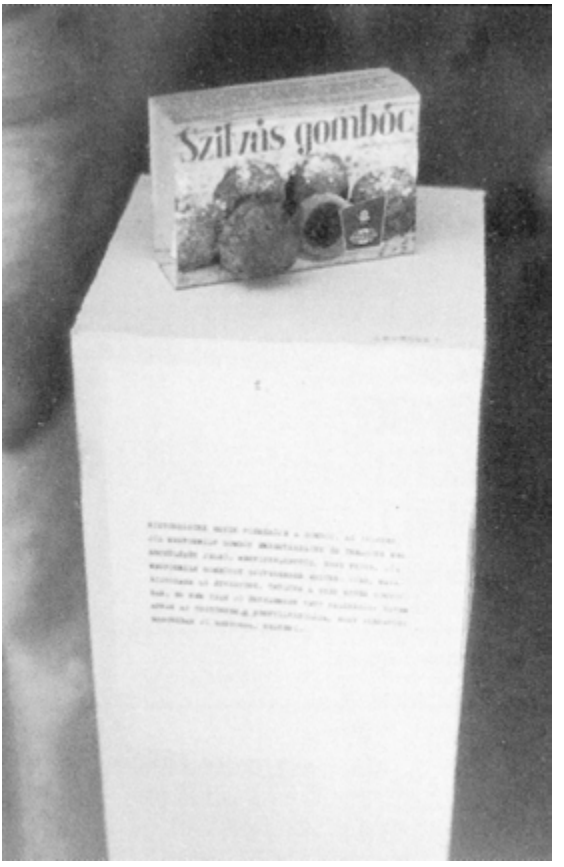

Figure 28.2.
Péter Legéndy,
Plum dumplings, 1972.
Artpool Research Center in
Budapest, courtesy of
Júlia Klaniczay and
György Galántai.

Some artists, such as László Méhes or Tamás Szentjóby, used the tool of language to relate to cooperation. Méhes made his intervention illegible by writing with a white crayon on the white surface of walls. Szentjóby coined the slogan "Rob nieco aby som mohl pomahat"—"Do a little to be able to help yourself"—written with some mistakes in Czech. The action constituted a polemic gesture toward the Marxist notion of labor and super-production. For the Hungarian artist, the act had the status of helping to liquidate the consequences of the totalitarian regime and was therefore defined by Szentjóby as a minimal amount of work, just the absolute essentials. The artist was very much aware that the individual was not in a position to compete with the scope of the machinery of the communist regime. Hence the notion of minimal labor—distorting the logic of the ideology. This construc-

tion, similar to Havel's "power of the powerless," was inviolable for totalitarian logic, like a fly for a sledgehammer.

The imperfect and erroneous use of the Czech language established the perfect device in relation to the tragic political incidents of 1968. The nature of the "Czech error" was of both a political and a linguistic nature. It was the effect of an abortive belief on the part of the Czechoslovakian intellectual elite in the seemingly universally valid language system and could therefore not possibly be cured by the alternative universal communication structure—of a linguistic, semantic, or moral character. The result of the artistic cooperation of Hungarian and Czechoslovakian artists in August 1972 was that it revealed the weakness of the network thus created. Although it was probably one of the most politically oriented moments of artistic cooperation in communist Europe, the artists succeeded only partially in escaping the utopia of the universal system of communication, taking revenge on the universal system forcefully imposed on them. The historical fact of this cooperation is hard to overestimate as it had an exceptional character, both in terms of content and its directly political nature.

29

Crossing the Border: The Foksal Gallery from Warsaw in Lausanne/Paris (1970) and Edinburgh (1972 and 1979)

Thomas Skowronek

The Foksal Gallery was certainly one of the few cultural institutions in Poland that could develop contacts with international partners in Socialist times. Thanks to its backing in the art community, mainly from Tadeusz Kantor and Ryszard Stanisławski, the gallery entered the international art scene during the late 1960s and early 1970s. This article will focus on two stages of its international experiences: Foksal's participation in the "3e Salon international de 'Galeries-pilotes'" in Lausanne (1970) and, a few years later, its attendance at the Edinburgh Festival (1972 and 1979).

When the Foksal Gallery was founded in 1966 by the art critics Wiesław Borowski, Hanka Ptaszkowska, and Mariusz Tchorek, some of the most respectable Polish artists of these times, such as Tadeusz Kantor and Henryk Stażewski, joined the gallery. Foksal mainly presented exhibitions that problematized the artistic process itself. As a public institution on the margins of the state-owned Visual Art Workshops (Pracownie Sztuk Plastycznych, PSP), it received infrastructural and material support to organize its artistic projects. While exhibiting modern and avant-garde art, the gallery kept an apparent distance from governmental endeavors to instrumentalize art.

However, Foksal's combination of different institutional layers and artistic discourses provoked ambivalent reactions. In recent times, a number of publications have focused on the gallery's artistic and institutional strategies. Marek Krajewski, for example, has analyzed the reluctance of the gallery to combine highly self-reflective art with contemplation about its social and political embeddedness. By so doing, Krajewski concludes, Foksal was taking the risk that its institutionally critical statements, finally, would turn into formalistic gestures.[1] In a recent publication, Luiza Nader examined the conceptualistic traits of the art presented at Foksal. The author observed a change from a self-critical institution to a gallery, rather conservatively defending its former status against the art community.[2] Besides other publications, these studies refer to the controversial achievements of the Foksal Gallery.[3] Within the scope of this publication, the present article wishes to continue the critical approach of these studies by examining some aspects of the genealogy of Foksal's international affairs.

The idea of international contacts was central for Foksal from its very beginning. Kantor's words became a leitmotif for the gallery: "National art only matters when it transcends its own national borders. Otherwise, it becomes particular."[4] However, the sociopolitical system in Poland imposed certain restrictions. Therefore, for every exhibition that should be taken abroad or every foreign artist invited, official permission was to be requested. Correspondingly, the first international experiences of the gallery began rather by chance. According to Borowski, one of the first contacts with members from foreign art worlds took place in Warsaw during the Seventh International Congress of the Association Internationale des Critiques d'Art (AICA) in 1960. Here, the group of critics met with Pierre Restany, for example. Al-

1 See Marek Krajewski, "Strategie upowszechniania sztuki w Polsce w latach 1956–1989. Na przykładzie Galerii Krzywe Koło, Galerii Foksal i Gruppy" (PhD diss., Adam Mickiewicz University, 1997), http://hdl.handle.net/10593/3505.

2 Luiza Nader, *Konceptualizm w PRL* (Warsaw: University of Warsaw Press, 2009).

3 For further aspects, cf. Marcin Lachowski, *Awangarda wobec instytucji. O sposobach prezentacji sztuki w PRL-u* (Lublin: Societas Scientiarum Catholicae Universitatis Lublinensis Ioannis Pauli II, 2006); Paweł Polit, "Warsaw's Foksal Gallery 1966–72: Between PLACE and Archive," *ARTMargins*, 23 January 2009, http://www.artmargins.com/index.php/2-articles/179-foksal-gallery-1966-72-between-place-and-archive; Thomas Skowronek, "Institutionelle Introjektionen. Poetiken der Galerien Foksal," in *Poesie Intermedial*, ed. Jeanette Fabian (Frankfurt/Main: Peter Lang, 2012), 181–217.

4 This article is based on an interview with Wiesław Borowski, Warsaw, 16 September 2010. All translations T. S.

though these first personal contacts did not result in cooperative projects immediately, they paved the way for future encounters. Thanks to the photographer Tadeusz Rolke, such a personal relationship was responsible for Foksal's first journey abroad, as well as the first foreign artists shown in the gallery. In 1967, a friend of Rolke's, Lars Englund from Sweden, had an exhibition at Foksal. In the following year, the gallery members received a private invitation to Stockholm. During this trip, they met with Pontus Hultén, at this time the director of Moderna Museet and the future founding director of the Centre Pompidou.

The "official" history of Foksal's travels abroad begins with a visit by Pierre Pauli, the founder of Lausanne's Musée des Arts Décoratifs. He came with an invitation to the "3e Salon international de Galeries-pilotes." The "Salon" was an exhibition of art galleries taking place in the Musée Cantonal des Beaux-Arts in Lausanne. In 1970 it was organized for the third time by René Berger, Paul-Henri Jaccard, Pierre Pauli, and others (the previous occasions having been in 1963 and 1966). In these years, a total of forty-three galleries from Europe, North and South America, and Japan exhibited at the "Salon." From Eastern Europe, there were three institutions besides Foksal: the Gallery of Contemporary Art (Zagreb, 1966), the Galerie Art Centre (Prague, 1966), and the Moderna Galerija (Ljubljana, 1970).[5] The Swiss agreed to cover all costs and to deal with any administrative matters. For organizational help, the gallerists turned to Kantor.[6] To represent Foksal, the following artists were chosen: J. Bereś, Z. Gostomski, T. Kantor, E. Krasińki, M. Stangret, and H. Stażewski. They were accompanied by the three gallerists and the photographer Eustachy Kossakowski. Except for Kantor, all eventually left for Lausanne.[7]

Concluding from the countries the galleries predominantly came from—in Western Europe and the United States—the "global" approach of these events was quite restricted. But considering the political division of Europe in East and West, the "Salon," certainly functioned as a means of transgressing these borders. In the preface to the catalog of the second "Salon," Berger mentions the antagonism of "America" and "Russia," though he reformu-

5 See http://college-de-vevey.vd.ch/auteur/gp123/index.html.

6 Thus, according to Borowski: "The project was done mainly by Kantor," Interview with Borowski.

7 Kantor did not receive his passport to leave the country. Cf. Interview with Borowski.

lates it at the same time. Currently, Berger writes in 1966, it is the cosmos where the superpowers continue their struggle. Nowadays, scientific discoveries are the foundation of supremacy. That is, Berger literarily moves the political conflict into space, extracting science as a means for knowledge production and control. Therefore, according to Berger, developments in the arts should be examined as meticulously as in other areas. For this reason, the author calls for "observatories" that would monitor ongoing processes, "research facilities" that would help to grasp not only "known constellations" but also "flashing lights" as well.[8] "Truth," Berger correspondingly continues in the preface to the third catalog, "becomes critique."[9] As a positive example, Berger discerns the Venice Biennale or documenta. And: "Somehow, the international salon of the 'Galeries-pilotes' pursues the same goal."[10] A "Galeries-pilotes" dedicates oneself to the "discovery of new talents."[11] Thus, Foksal was represented here as a scientific institution observing the development of art in Poland, based on the elastic paradigm of universalistic and modern art. According to Borowski, the focus stayed on art; no ideological or political issues were raised.[12] Collateral to the proceeding artistic exchange, the participants encountered each other as professionals of perception. Each gallery observed artistic and institutional developments while at the same time being observed. Despite some sociopolitical differences, art galleries in the East and West had to cope with similar factors. Namely, the *White Cube* as one of the spatial and discursive conditions of exhibiting art, catalogs, and archives as administrative devices or the task of interconnecting collectors, critics, and an interested public with artists and their art. Thus, the "Salon" functioned as an observational technology, confirming and reinforcing the ultimately scientific role of galleries that, in the words of René Berger, consisted in the production of knowledge and truth.

For Foksal, the sojourn in Lausanne was a gateway for further meetings. In Chexbres, they met with Theodor Ahrenberg, a collector interested in

8 René Berger, *Bedeutung und Ziel der internationalen Ausstellung der "Galeries-Pilotes." Vorwort zum Katalog der 2. Ausstellung der "Galeries-Pilotes"* (Lausanne: Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts, 1966), 10.

9 René Berger, "Préface," in *3e Salon international de Galeries pilotes. Lausanne. Paris. Artistes et découvreurs de notre temps*, ed. René Berger et al. (Lausanne: Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts, 1970), IX–X, X. Translation T. S.

10 Berger, *Bedeutung und Ziel der internationalen Ausstellung der "Galeries-Pilotes"*, 11.

11 Ibid.

12 Interview with Borowski.

Eastern European artists, notably in Kantor. In Rome, Foksal stayed with the artist Achille Perilli who was among the first foreign artists exhibiting at the gallery (in 1969). Finally, the Foksal group also visited the Venice Biennale. After the exhibition finished in Lausanne, it moved to Paris at the end of October 1970, where it was exhibited in the Musée National d'Art Moderne. As before, the members of the Foksal group came to the exhibition. This time, it was Jean Leymarie, the director of the museum, who was an important contact person, as well as Pierre Restany, with whom the gallerists refreshed their contact from Warsaw.[13] Asked about the immediate consequences of the "Salon" for the gallery, Borowski referred to the directory that was created with contacts in Western art worlds.[14] Furthermore, Foksal asked *Studio International* for a subscription. Subsequently, the gallery received this and many other Western publications, such as *Art Forum* or *Kunstforum*. Thus, the "concrete" travel experiences were translated into an administrative compilation, where locations and persons were represented as junctions in a discursive network. Interestingly, this mapping was, in part, under way before Foksal left for Lausanne, thanks to Kantor or Perilli. The effect the journey had can be described as a realignment of a discursive map. Within this realm, future inspections of geographical spaces as well as exhibitional projects were preliminarily staged. To give a negative example, a presentation of Beuys, planned in the 1970s, could not be realized due to interference from Polish officials.[15] Thus, while this project remained inside the gallery's administrative regime, it still "transpassed," in its own way, national borders and geographical distances between Düsseldorf and Warsaw.

After the "Salon," the next experiences abroad were in Scotland in 1972 and 1979. Once again, the invitation to participate arrived from the outside. But, obviously, it was also a result of Foksal's reputation, the gallery having become well established by then. And it was Kantor, once again, who functioned as a key mediator for Foksal. Richard Demarco, one of the organizers of the Fringe Festival in Edinburgh, was fond of the art he saw in the gallery.[16] Thus, he agreed to invite Kantor's theater "Cricot 2," together with Foksal, as

13 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid., 16 September 2010. Similarly, in 2004 a major exhibition of Foksal in Munich did not materialize.
16 Ibid.

well as other artists from Poland.[17] The success "Cricot 2" had in Edinburgh was, partially, also one for the gallery. Contemporary art from Poland was recognized as part of a cutting-edge visual culture. As a consequence, Demarco continued his cooperation with Foksal in subsequent years. In 1979, the Foksal Gallery was back in Edinburgh. As before, it was part of a major event, as the press release of the Richard Demarco Gallery shows:

> The 1979 Edinburgh Festival will see the Demarco Gallery much involved in the Official Festival program and on the Fringe. The official program of exhibitions will include the Demarco Gallery's exhibition presenting … two important Polish artists for the first time in Britain. These artists, … Witkiewicz and … Stazewski, represent the widest possible range of the Polish visual art character. Whereas Witkiewicz is the personification of Polish Expressionism, Stazewski represents the extraordinary development of Polish Constructivism, linked to the Russian Constructivist School in the 20s. These two exhibitions will be presented at the Scottish Arts Council's Fruitmarket Gallery with financial support of the Scottish Arts Council and in association with the Łódź Museum, Polish Ministry of Culture and the Third Eye Centre in Glasgow, which will be presenting the exhibitions in Glasgow in the early autumn. The Demarco Gallery is also presenting two other Polish exhibitions, one at Gladstone's Court in the Royal Mile, of ten contemporary Polish artists, selected by Ryszard Stanisławski of the Łódź Museum; the other is tracing the history and philosophy of the Foksal Gallery in Warsaw from 1966 to the present day. It will be at the Demarco Gallery.[18]

This document can be interpreted as a representation of the discursive order by which contemporary art was mediated. Schematically speaking, art institutions in Poland and Scotland were set in relation to each other in hierarchical

17 Noted in the margin, although the exhibition in Edinburgh was similar to that in Lausanne, it represented a changed institution. Due to internal conflicts in these times, Ptaszkowska and Tchorek left the gallery as well as the artists Krasiński and Stażewski. Cf. Anka Ptaszkowska, "Wspólny czas i wspólne miejsce. My in On. My i On. My i Ja. Ja i On. (próba rozwarstwienia)," in *Tadeusz Kantor z archiwum Galerii Foksal*, ed. Małgorzata Jurkiewicz, Joanna Mytkowska, and Andrzej Przywara (Warsaw: Gallery Foksal, 1998), 439–52, 450, 452.

18 The Richard Demarco Gallery Ltd., "Press Release" (1979) in the archive of the Foksal Gallery (Warsaw).

accordance. So, works of "pivotal" importance, by Witkiewicz and Stażewski, were presented in an official institution, the Fruitmarket Gallery, before being sent to the Third Eye Centre in Glasgow, whereas contemporary art that, seemingly, did not bare the label of representing the Polish "character" was arranged in other institutions, at Gladstone's Court and in the Demarco Gallery itself. Foksal presented a historiographical survey of its past activities, a history of the gallery to which Stażewski also belonged. This artist, though, was part of the "official program" as well. By positioning Stażewski on two poles of the exhibitional program, at least nominally, a link was established between official and "semi-official" entities. Correspondingly, among the artists selected by Stanisławski for Gladstone's Court were Bereś, Kantor, and Krasiński, who also cooperated with the gallery. Thus, the archival construction of Foksal's history presented at Demarco can be interpreted as a comment on the other exhibitions. The viewpoint from which this survey of Polish art in the twentieth century receives its coherence is represented as being located in the Foksal Gallery that, in turn, is framed by Demarco's gallery. Because the works exhibited combine the artistic process in Poland of the twentieth century from past till present, a similar equation affects the institutional context. Thus, an umbrella is put up not only to "represent the . . . Polish visual art character," but also to cover the institutional order of things. In this sense, the Scottish Arts Council, the Łódź Museum, and the Polish Ministry of Culture are conveying the consecrational power of legitimizing art to both the galleries.

> Richard Demarco's close liaison with the Polish Ministry of Culture, with Ryszard Stanisławski of the Łódź Museum of Art and Wieslaw Borowski of the Foksal Gallery in Warsaw has produced a tri-partite contribution in which the official, the acceptable and the radical elements in Polish art meet on neutral ground.[19]

From this perspective, Demarco's "neutral ground" appears as a benchmark of artistic processes in Poland.

In his review about the "Polish month in Edinburgh," Paul Overy starts with the words: "This September was the fortieth anniversary of the Ger-

19 Felix McCullough, "Edinburgh Festival 1979," *Arts Review* 18 (1979): 454–55, 455.

man invasion in Poland, and Britain's somewhat tardy declaration of war two days later. In Edinburgh, Richard Demarco presented four exhibitions of Polish art for the Festival."[20] With this opening, Overy places his following deliberations in a political context. His favor is with Foksal, to which he attributes "the most interesting work today," and in the exploration of "that area between drama and the visual arts" he recognizes something familiar.[21] "[It's] worth reflecting," the critic concludes, "that much of the most interesting works in Britain today, like that of Stuart Brisley or Ian Breakwell, lies in that area too."[22] Thus, when Germany was at the beginning of the article, at the end it is Britain that stands next to Poland. This replacement appears as a metaphorical realization of the obligations that historically were undertaken "somewhat tardy," as Overy says.[23] It indicates the sociopolitical embeddedness of art processes and a symbolic order of governmental affairs. Thus, Foksal's attendance in Edinburgh must be seen in a geopolitical context. As Borowski himself mentioned, these times were the "Gierek era."[24] The gallery was fully aware of this. However, now it was not Germany anymore—to take Overy's example—that constituted an obstacle, but the problematic sociopolitical regime(s) in communist Europe.[25] In this respect, the exhibition in Edinburgh, on "neutral ground," can be interpreted as a tactical appropriation of Polish art and its separation from the Eastern Bloc. A good argument for this can be found in another of Overy's surveys. "[It] is not entirely surprising that in its variety, international awareness, internecine aggressiveness and peculiar brittleness, the art scene in Poland reminds one most of Italy among Western countries."[26] This "Italianization" of Polish matters appears as a way of constructing familiarity in alien territory. Basically, Overy writes, "East Europe . . . remains unknown ground."[27] Foksal, though, functioned as a vehicle conveying the idea that Eastern Europe was, hypothetically at least, knowable, that it was part of a common

20 Paul Overy, "Edinburgh's Polish Month," *Art Monthly* 30 (1979): 10–11, 10.
21 Ibid., 11.
22 Ibid.
23 Ibid., 10.
24 Interview with Borowski.
25 Of course, in 1939 and later Germany was not a mere "obstacle" for the national and cultural development in Poland, but a hostile aggressor.
26 Paul Overy, "Polish Pluralism," *Art Monthly* 28 (1979): 12–15, 15.
27 Ibid., 12.

knowledge space. The "radical" art presented at the gallery was the "radix" of this idea.[28]

For the gallery, cooperation with Demarco continued to be fruitful. From Edinburgh the exhibition went to the Third Eye Centre in Glasgow. The following year, 1980, this exhibition was presented at the Institute of Contemporary Art in London and at the Project Gallery in Dublin.

Before coming to a general conclusion, a few words about some aspects that could not be considered here: (1a) The *Exchange between Artists, 1931–1982: Poland–USA*, an exhibition, organized by Anka Ptaszkowska in 1982 in Paris, together with Pontus Hultén, and in cooperation with Foksal. Thanks to its "Swedish connection," Olle Granath, director of Moderna Museet, suggested the gallery host an exhibition called *Dialog*. Here, in 1985, works of Polish artists were exhibited alongside works of other European and North American artists with which the former wished to enter into spatial interaction. Thus, for example, Henryk Stażewski was presented in dialogue with Daniel Buren. Foksal's other international experiences were the Art Frankfurt (1988 and 1991) and the Art Hamburg (1993). (1b) Another aspect, almost completely omitted here, is the exhibitions of foreign artists in Warsaw. Beginning with the solo exhibition by Lars Englund in 1967, there have been over thirty artists from abroad at the gallery. Among them are such renowned names as Art & Language, Christian Boltanski, Daniel Buren, Allan Kaprow, and Anselm Kiefer.[29] (1c) Also, the contacts between Foksal and official cultural institutions, councils, and embassies of countries such as Germany, France, or Great Britain were not studied. (2a) The gallery's archive is of great importance. It offers not only information about Foksal's exhibitions and voyages, but also administrative correspondence. Additionally, it presents a specific material and haptical side of the gallery's institutional endeavors. That is, it also bears auratic traces of geographic trajectories with a poetological dimension of their own that deserves further attention. The photographic works and documents in the archive are worth particular consideration. (2b) Before the initial Foksal group split up in 1970, the gallerists had discussed and, partially, agreed on the pronouncement of a new regulation for the institution. This "New Regulation for Cooperation with the

28 McCullough "Edinburgh Festival 1979," 452.

29 As can be seen on the homepage of the gallery: http://www.galeriafoksal.pl/old/hist_p.htm.

Foksal Gallery PSP" (Nowy Regulamin Współpracy z Galerią Foksal PSP), initiated by Ptaszkowska, seems to be close to some deliberations undertaken by the Situationist International (cf. in this regard also Borowski's term "Pseudoawangarda" (see below)); it was not adopted, though.[30] (2c) Furthermore, to what extent have Foksal's international experiences intensified existing differences between the gallery and the Polish art community? In his text "Pseudoawangarda" (1975), Borowski ambivalently divides the Polish art world into "real" and "fake" avant-gardists; the author also argues in reference to the West, thus taking a viewpoint from outside Poland in order to segregate internal matters.[31] (2d) Additionally, and viewed from a post-1989 perspective, it is worth examining to what extent this notion of institutional superiority affected the further history of the gallery and beyond. Primarily, this concerns the problematic relationship between the gallery and the Foksal Gallery Foundation (FGF) that was established in 1997, because the standing of the FGF amid the contemporary art community is not unambivalent. Here, too, a narrowing of discursive access possibilities is sometimes criticized. In this context, the FGF's institutional contacts would be worth examining. Their genealogy partly reaches back to the gallery's times. This seems to be the case with a former member of the FGF, Joanna Mytkowska, for example. Before she took up the position of director of the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, she was curator at the Centre Pompidou in Paris. As has been shown, this museum established contacts with the Foksal Gallery many years ago.

Foksal's international relationships were mainly built on personal contacts and the reputation they mediated. Contacts established in early times were cultivated and helped when organizing ventures in the following years. Consequently, Foksal's network was expanding. In this context, it was Demarco in particular who helped the gallery, but others did so as well: artists, museum directors and curators, collectors, art journals, etc.

Looking back at Lausanne and Edinburgh and considering the question of ideology, two main aspects have to be outlined. In Lausanne, political aspects were, at least *explicitly*, set aside in favor of a universalistic paradigm of cultural communication. Art as "science" and galleries as "observatories"

30 Ptaszkowska, "Wspólny czas i wspólne miejsce," 451.
31 Wiesław Borowski, "Pseudoawangarda," *Kul'tura*, 23 March 1975, 11–12.

were two of the main devices that regulated this interchange. Thus, the Foksal Gallery was part of a symbolic order that perpetuated the notion of an aestheticized, socially detached knowledge production. This went hand-in-hand with the galleries' self-perception as avant-garde. In Edinburgh, however, a more politicized interpretation was suggested by the exhibitional context. The political dimension of this event consisted, at first, in the historically connoted seizure of Polish art from the twentieth century and its trenchant reproduction as a galleristic projection, while official institutions were pushed to the margins. Ultimately, it was the galleries, Demarco and Foksal, that constituted the prevailing focal point, from which the synopsis received its coherence. Accordingly, the next step was a rhetorical appropriation of Polish art and its separation from the Eastern Bloc. Interestingly, this rendering of art was considered a "neutral" presentation. On both layers, therefore, Foksal functioned as a frame for detaching the presentation of art processes. Although the events, Lausanne and Edinburgh, differed in respect to the degree of politicization, a similar device for regulating the symbolic order seems to have been in operation: the idea of a scientific and neutral representation of contemporary art. Against all means of institutional decomposition that Foksal and others have undertaken, it was the paradigm of the White Cube that "crossed the border"—it "closed the gap."

30

To Each Their Own Reality: The Art of the FRG and the GDR at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris in 1981

Mathilde Arnoux

In 1981, two exhibitions of contemporary German art take place in succession at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris. The first, entitled *Art Allemagne Aujourd'hui* (Art Germany today), is organized by Suzanne Pagé and René Block at L'Arc and at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, and it embodies the recognition of German art of the second half of the twentieth century by French museums.[1] Alongside the works of Joseph Beuys, Wolf Vostell, Sigmar Polke, Gerhard Richter, Hanne Darboven, Palermo and Klaus Rinke, the exhibition presents paintings by Georg Baselitz, A. R. Penck, Markus Lüpertz, and Jörg Immendorff; this is one of the first

1 See the catalog of *Art Allemagne Aujourd'hui. Différents aspects de l'art actuel en république fédérale d'Allemagne* (Paris: ARC/Musée d'art moderne de la ville de Paris, 1981). The first stages of this research were carried out in the context of a thesis. See Mathilde Arnoux, "Les musées français et la peinture allemande 1871–1981" (Thesis, MSH/Centre Allemand d'Histoire de l'art, 2007). More in-depth research subsequently followed during a seminar, the results of which were published and which we recommend for a thorough study of the exhibition *Art Allemagne Aujourd'hui*; see Mathilde Arnoux, "*Art Allemagne Aujourd'hui* ou la reconnaissance de l'art allemand contemporain par les musées français," *Etudes germaniques* 64 (2009): 1037–53. The article mentioned here is the result of research into new archives and our continued reflections on the marks left by the Cold War on writing about the history of art.

events outside Germany to showcase these artists.[2] A few months later, an exhibition opens which has now almost faded into oblivion. Only a few specialist publications on the issue of the cultural relations of the GDR, such as *Kunst als Botschafter einer künstlichen Nation* by Christian Saehrendt, still refer to it. This exhibition, organized by Bernadette Contensou, is entitled *Peinture et gravure en République démocratique allemande*. It presents works by Bernhard Heisig, Werner Tübke, Volker Stelzmann, Hartwig Ebersbach, Arno Rink, and others, who are now considered to have been the most important representatives of GDR art.[3]

These two exhibitions are to be seen in the context of the signing of cultural agreements between France and both Germanies at the beginning of the 1980s. In February 1981, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing meets Helmut Schmidt on the occasion of the Franco-German Summit, which for the first time focuses on the issue of cultural relations between the two countries. Originally planned for November 1980, the opening of *Art Allemagne Aujourd'hui*—an ambassadorial exhibition of contemporary German culture—is postponed so as to provide the backdrop for this meeting. The exhibition of GDR art occurs in the context of the signing of the cultural agreement between the GDR and France in 1980, and paves the way for the establishment of a French cultural center in East Berlin in 1984. A GDR cultural center opens at 117 Boulevard Saint Germain in 1983. Beyond the characteristic matters of cultural diplomacy, a study of these two exhibitions reveals the impact of the Cold War on the selective approach to the past taken by the two Germanies. Through their choices, each explains the grounds for, and legitimacy of, having established the values system that prevails in their own country. *Art Allemagne Aujourd'hui* sees itself as the legitimate representative of contemporary German identity, while the GDR exhibition asserts the good founded by socialist realism to better embody a possible alternative to the crisis of values experienced by the West. Each one presents a distinct and rival model of society. The ideas proposed in each exhibition catalog thus reveal the extent to which the ideological issues resulting from the Cold War had a strong impact

2 This interest in young German artists is expressed in various exhibitions organized in the same year in Europe; on this subject, see *Schilderkunst in Duitsland 1981. Peinture en Allemagne* (Brussels: Société des expositions du Palais des Beaux-Arts de Bruxelles, 1981), and *A New Spirit in Painting* (London: Royal Academy, 1981).

3 See, for example, the GDR artists recently presented in the exhibition *Kunst und Kalter Krieg. Deutsche Positionen 1945–89*, Nuremberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum, 2009.

on the way in which FRG and GDR art were presented and interpreted. Everything appears to place the two Germanies in stark contrast and it would therefore be unthinkable to establish any kind of relation between the artistic practices used on either side of the Iron Curtain. Today, it is striking to note that the differences between the two models are manifested around a common axis constituted by the notion of the real/reality. As it is sufficiently abstract, this notion is freely interpreted by each Germany; it very much determines the understanding of the artistic scene in the form of a model, at the same time justifying the distinctiveness and legitimacy of that model. This notion—used in a characteristic manner in each case—merits special examination in order to gain a better understanding of what differentiates the discourses on the art of the FRG and that of the GDR.

The pieces selected for *Art Allemagne Aujourd'hui* are extremely diverse. Although not exhaustive, the selection could be considered representative of what was being done during the 1960s and 1970s in Germany. This is thanks to Suzanne Pagé and her wisdom in working with René Block, one of the most important figures in the Western art market, as well as the recommendations of artists such as Vostell and Beuys.[4]

Suzanne Pagé's introduction stresses the variety of practices. Apart from the "case of Beuys," who is set aside as a timeless phenomenon,[5] Suzanne Pagé marks the distinction between the pre-1968 generation, characterized by engagement, and that of post-1968, characterized by disillusionment. The diversity of practices, illustrated by the variety of mediums presented (painting, sculpture, environments, video installations, etc.), but also by distinct ways of creating art, speaks for a complex and multifaceted Germany and rules out the idea of a supposed Germanness. Freed from simplistic terminology, the search to validate specifically German characteristics is based on the originality of contemporary artistic practices. However, anyone attempting to get closer to the artistic singularity of Germany cannot really be content with characterizing it by its diversity and originality; coherence must be found in the scene in question. This coherence will be affirmed through one drawing and three themes that can be found in the catalog texts.

4 Suzanne Pagé, "Introduction," in *Art Allemagne Aujourd'hui*, 5.

5 On this subject, see Maïté Vissault, *Der Beuys Komplex—l'identité allemande à travers la réception de l'œuvre de Joseph Beuys (1945–1986)* (Dijon: Les Presses du Réel, 2010).

In response to the need to find coherence, René Block creates a picture of the river of German art, which illustrates several sources from which contemporary German art finds its inspiration. Coming from the avant-garde schools of the beginning of the century—expressionism, dadaism, Bauhaus, etc.—it ignores New Objectivity. After having gone underground during the Nazi period, the river resurfaces. Beuys is one of the tributaries having given it most nourishment, and several rivers and streams merge to keep it moving, passing through New York and Paris. The variety and diversity of the sources make up the river that inspires Germany and its culture; it is their sum that constitutes the importance and power of German culture. There is no univocity. Contemporary creation is a complex network covering all of Germany and its culture benefiting from permeations from outside.

The first theme, which aims to set out the diversity of expression in a coherent whole, is very much influenced by the diplomatic issues that prevailed during the exhibition. This theme develops the idea that the originality and variety of expression are largely dependent on the political system of the FRG as a guarantor of freedom, modernity, creativity, and autonomy.

The second theme presents the autonomy of the FRG, in relation to the United States, as a characteristic that interlinks artistic expressions. This is not about a wholesale rejection of the United States—without which the river of German art would not pass through New York. The aim is to break with the idea of a universal model, of standardization in line with American values to highlight the value of the singularities.

Finally, to affirm this coherence of expression, the works—varied as they may be—are for the most part placed in the context of a notion that can be identified with the real. According to the works, this notion is interpreted from a temporal point of view (the real being current events, the present) or from a material point of view (the real being the surrounding world, that of concrete objects), which corresponds with the very ambiguity in the definition of the term. This link between the works and the real, in terms of current events, is recurrent.

The relationship with the real differs from one artist to the next. It is applied to practices that use the introduction of objects in works (Vostell) and to certain forms of conceptual art that aim to remove the barrier between art and life (Haacke), as well as in certain practices—returning to representation

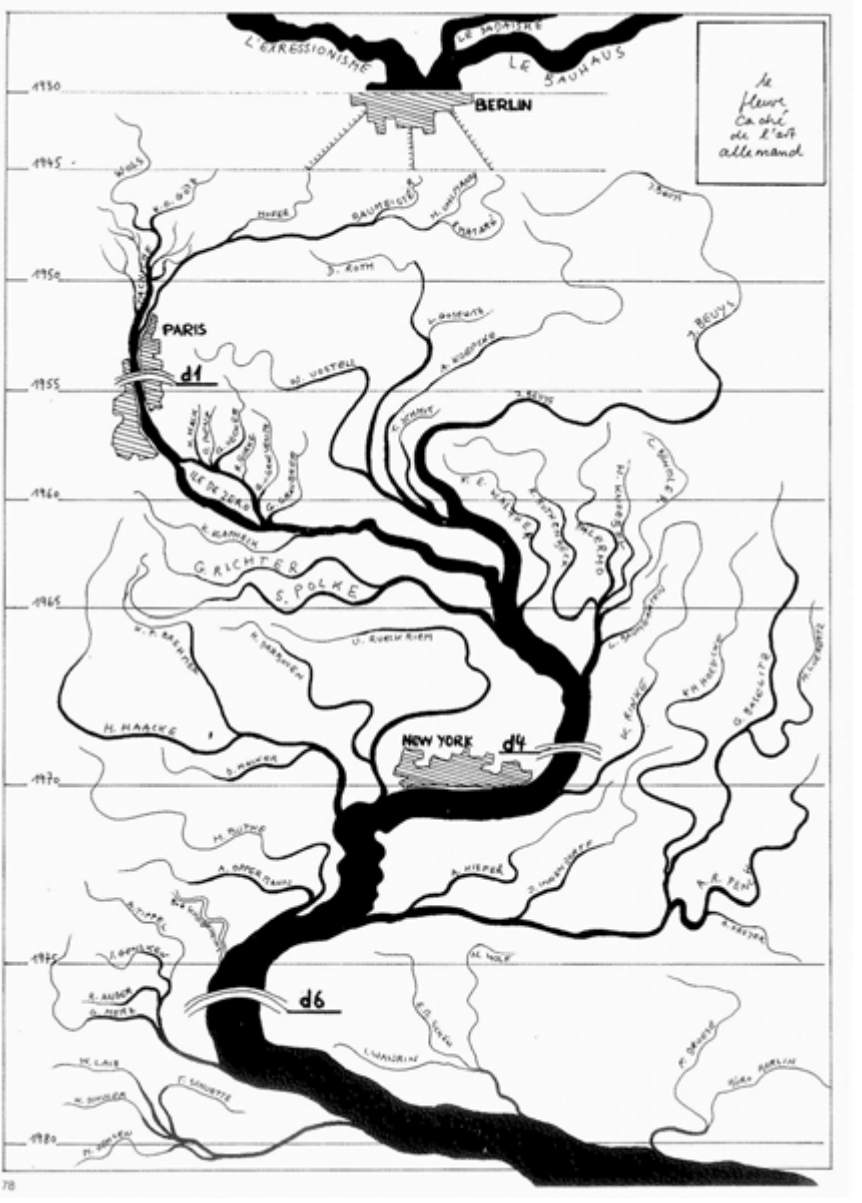

Figure 30.1.
René Block, *Le fleuve caché de l'art allemand*, catalogue *Art Allemagne Aujourd'hui. Différents aspects de l'art actuel en république fédérale d'Allemagne*. Musée d'Art moderne de la ville de Paris, 1981. Courtesy René Block.

in painting—that are less tuned into current events, but that question the place of the artist in the present-day world and liken reality to truth (Immendorff). In her introduction, Suzanne Pagé thus identifies as a common feature of the two generations represented in the exhibition their

> rootedness in a specific historical or geographical context, which refers to a set of problems, a reality or even a local, regional or national tradition. This rootedness can also take the form of more or less obscure folk or mythical references, which should be appraised in the narrow margin in which "all good art is national, and all national art is bad" (Christian Krogh).[6]

In general, the play on the ambiguity of the notion of the real in actual fact enables the two generations to be generally placed in opposition to one another.

From this point of view, the exhibition is exemplary in its capacity to bring together these diverse practices and in its endeavor to grasp them as a whole. However, although some biases appear to be sufficiently clearly explained in the introduction—such as the absence of Germans living abroad or of foreigners living in Germany—all the more surprising is the absence of a presentation of tendencies enabling a link to be established between contemporary German painting and New Objectivity. Here, we find once again the problem already raised by the hidden river of German art which did not feature New Objectivity as one of the foundations of contemporary German art.

This absence must be interpreted as a reflection of the questions posed by the definition of the identities of the two Germanies, whether both types of practice (representation and neodadaism) coexist in reality in both blocs. The East is only officially authorized to present tendencies born of what is known as socialist realism, which is the only type of realism recognized by the regime. As for the West, it presents the diversity of practices as the embodiment of freedom of expression, engagement, and subversion, and as the recognition of the individual. Such a strong assertion of the "real" as the object of contemporary German artists' concern in their capacity to unite a variety of practices is actually in opposition to the ambitions of the East, which gathers all practices around one and the same movement: realism.

6 Pagé, "Introduction," 6.

The exhibition of GDR art that opens a few months later at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris is presented under the aegis of realism. The term embodies the identity of the GDR and is part of an historic continuity of German tradition. It is supposed to be unitary, but it claims various forms. It is supposed to be exemplary in the responses it provides to the drift of contemporary artistic practices.

The term "realism" is at once used by Hans Joachim Hoffman, Minister of Culture of the GDR, in his foreword; he writes that "Realism, social commitment, vitality, philosophical profundity, sensibility, aspirations of effectiveness and action on a social level, and the search for creative debate are without any doubt the driving forces of many artists."[7] Further, he explains that the realism in question is not so much formal but spiritual. The aim is to show the diversity that the term "realism" encompasses. Here we find the idea of a critical realism as it had been developed by Wolfgang Hütt in his 1957 article "Der kritische Realismus in Deutschland" (Critical realism in Germany), published in *Bildende Kunst*[8] and which was followed by reflections in the 1960s on the nature of realist representation in order to find a way round strict instructions.[9]

Realism appears as "a counterproposition" committed to the tendencies, to personal mythology and to thematic disengagement, and the development of an interest in GDR art appears as a signal that it contains values shared by all.[10] It is highly likely that Lothar Lang is referring here to recent expressions of interest in GDR art to the west of the Iron Curtain: be it the growth of a market around the Hake Gallery, run by Michael Werner in Cologne in the

7 Lothar Lang, "De quelques particularités de la peinture et des arts graphiques en R.D.A.," in *Peinture et gravure en République démocratique allemande* (Paris: Musée d'art moderne de la ville de Paris, 1981).

8 Wolfgang Hütt, "Der kritische Realismus in Deutschland," *Bildende Kunst* 1 (1957): 9–13.

9 See Siegfried Heinz Begenau, "Wir müssen über die Form sprechen," *Bildende Kunst* 6 (1965), 287–92. Begenau was editor-in-chief of the review *Bildende Kunst* and, in his 1965 text, he presents the various paths that can lead to realism. He considers that realist content takes precedence, not form. The form does not need to be naturalist in order to carry the realist message.

10 Lang, "De quelques particularités de la peinture et des arts graphiques en R.D.A." "The reasons for the growing interest shown in GDR art are diverse and do not lie alone in the remarkable continuity of a relentless, passionate search for new and realist forms of expression, adapted to our time. It is much more likely that one of the reasons for this phenomenon lies in the fact that GDR art is perceived as a counterproposition committed to tendencies, to personal mythology, and to thematic disengagement. In other words, a broad public is interested primarily in the ideas (content) to which GDR art gives expression in its works. Through art, an interest is shown in the country in which these works were created and in the social processes under way there."

late 1960s; the makeup of the Peter Ludwig collection; or the participation of six GDR artists in documenta 6 in 1977.

The term "realism" is used by every author contributing to the catalog; Raoul-Jean Moulin, art critic for *L'Humanité*, presents realism as a traditional German value and thus gives it its historical legitimacy.[11] Remaining thus true to the Zhdanovist conception of socialist realism which takes its inspiration from classical heritage,[12] Moulin also appeals to traditional views of French criticism of German art, which attribute to it realist qualities ranging from ugliness to a sense of expression.[13]

If we return to the river metaphor illustrated by René Block for the FRG scene, the art of the GDR would have as its source the Renaissance and New Objectivity; it would not be disturbed by tributaries, and it would be alone in feeding Germany and its culture. Its ambition would be to expand, and it would irrigate land well beyond Germany's borders. This image shows the major divisions between the two Germanies, and thus the views carried by the *Art Allemagne Aujourd'hui* exhibition are seen in a new light. In rejecting the critical realism of the West, which takes its inspiration from the 1920s

11 Raoul-Jean Moulin, "Pour tenter d'en finir avec quelques idées reçues," in *Peinture et gravure en République démocratique allemande* (Paris: Musée d'art moderne de la ville de Paris, 1981). "Without providing an inventory of the works collected here, the first thing to note is the fact that the majority of them claim to be realist. But there are several *forms* of realism that express not only several conceptions of what is real, but also several conceptions of the painter's work that can be seen even in certain painters who refer to socialist realism. In their differences, these realisms interrogate us and interrogate the painting, because the questions they pose—beyond any political reduction—are articulated in relation to the realist tradition of German art since the Renaissance, from Dürer to Dix, but also in relation to the expressionist shock of the 1920s and to the new methods of representation that spread throughout the world from the 1960s. This is the context in which the preoccupations of Sitte, Heisig, Mattheuer, Stelzmann or Tübke are to be seen."

12 Boris Groys, *Staline œuvre d'art totale* (Nîmes: Jacqueline Chambon, 1990).

13 On this subject, see the writings of Claude Digeon in *La crise allemande de la pensée française* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1959); René Cheval, "Cent ans d'affectivité franco-allemande ou l'ère des stéréotypes," *Revue d'Allemagne* 4 (1972): 603–14; Gabriel Bleeke-Byrne, "French Perceptions of German Art (1800–1850). Studies in Stereotypes and their Ideological Influence" (PhD diss., Brown University, 1989); the pieces by Uwe Fleckner, "L'art allemand et son public français. Réception et transferts artistiques au XIXe siècle," François-René Martin, "Une critique agonistique. Schongauer et Grünewald en France, entre 1840 et 1914," Christian Heck, "Entre naturalisme et mystique: Joris-Karl Huysmans et les primitifs allemands," in *De Grünewald à Menzel. L'image de l'art allemand en France au XIXe siècle*, ed., Uwe Fleckner and Thomas W. Gaehtgens (Paris: MSH/Centre Allemand d'Histoire de l'Art, 2003), 1–14, 57–84, and 85–100; Marie Gispert, "'L'Allemagne n'a pas de peintres.' Diffusion et réception de l'art allemand moderne en France durant l'Entre-deux-guerres, 1918–1939" (PhD diss., Université Paris I, 2006); Friederike Kitschen, "Befremdlich anders: das französische Bild der deutschen Kunst," in *Deutsche Kunst. Französische Perspektiven, 1870–1945. Quellen und Kommentare zur Kunstkritik*, ed. Friederike Kitschen and Julia Drost (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2007), 89–98.

and from New Objectivity in particular,[14] Suzanne Pagé excludes the practices that reveal the preoccupations shared by both the FRG and the GDR, and she asserts the singularity of the Western scene, she defines its originality. The autonomy claimed in relation to the United States intends to demonstrate that Western Europe possesses the resources to respond to the crisis of the avant-gardes and does not need a new universal model like the one proposed by Lothar Lang.

However, if we take a closer look, there is no more coherence in the content than the style at the heart of the German scene of the GDR as it is represented, and the term realism is all encompassing. Of course, only the traditional painting and engraving practices are presented, but they are nonetheless extremely varied. Next to official figures—each of whom expresses their commitment to the SED in different terms, with the ideological reach of their works being far from univocal—such as Bernhard Heisig, Willi Sitte, or Wolfgang Mattheuer—we also find Hartwig Ebersbach or Claus Carlfriedrich, whose collage and drawing practices do not carry the conventional hallmarks of socialist realism. Thus, despite the introductory discourse that seemed to want to standardize everything under the term "realism," the exhibition is testament to the diversity of artistic production in East Germany, thanks to Bernadette Contensou, who refused to have the choice of artists dictated to her.[15]

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14 In the 1970s, the representatives of this trend were graphic artists such as Klaus Vogelgesangs or Wolfgang Petrick.

15 Willi Sitte, president of the Union of Artists, and Lothar Lang, art critic and art historian, had drawn up a list of artists who were to appear in this exhibition. Lang, who, "can quite clearly leave the country easily, is very familiar with international art, and as he is a good friend of Mr. Sitte, it was easier for me to put through the changes I wanted to make to the established list" (account by Bernadette Contensou following a trip she made to the GDR in October 1979 in preparation for the exhibition). Moreover, this aspect had been a decisive point in the preparation of the exhibition. Dr. Prehn, first secretary of the embassy of the GDR, had initially suggested, on the recommendations of his country, an exhibition containing 100 to 120 paintings and prints by Bernhard Heisig, Harald Metzkes, Willi Sitte, and Werner Tübke. But Bernadette Contensou refuses to have the choice of artists dictated to her. With a great deal of support from the official cultural relations bodies, this exhibition does not inspire the enthusiasm of the organizer. Bernadette Contensou writes: "This general survey allows us to create an exhibition that is not spectacular—to borrow the term used by a representative of the German Ministry of Culture—but that is rather interesting at an information level. This exhibition was to present some twenty artists and engravers; sculpture, which is very academic, is not of interest. The generation of the immediate postwar period is largely represented by Willi Sitte and Bernhard Heisig—president and first vice president respectively of the Union of Artists—and in these capacities they are inevitable. Their work is extremely revealing of this generation, which is obsessed by the problems of the battle against fascism and the glorification of work. But these two artists also show a real painter's temperament. The younger generation, more liberated from this obsession, shows—at

Through these two exhibitions, the two German cultures appear to be distinct, each one characterized by different artistic practices and heritages. However, this question of the division of German culture is at the heart of the debate concerning the "German question" formulated at the beginning of the 1980s. It raises the fundamental question as to whether the division of the country was the essential cause of divided national feeling, and whether the reunification of Germany alone would provide a way out from this dilemma. It would be presumptuous to think that the organizers of the exhibition had sought to give a definitive answer to the question, yet their choices were still strongly influenced by a certain conception of contemporary German culture. Showcasing the contemporary art scene of West Germany in "its perspectives, its radicalism, and its difference" is not an attempt to reunite the two Germanies in one and the same culture; rather, it is an attempt to declare an official representative.

From the opposition of the postwar years between abstraction in the West and socialist realism in the East, the 1960s slide toward a complex opposition, expressing equivalent facts between the "real" as carried by the diversity of expression in the West and the "real" as carried by realism in the East. Each of these conceptions has an effect on the choices made at the heart of cultural heritage, in accordance with the image that the country wishes to convey. Beyond art, these are two visions of the world in direct opposition. One can thus understand the way in which classifications were made on each side of the Iron Curtain by applying the principles under which attempts were made to place works of arts. These discourses have strongly affected our understanding of the artistic scene of this period. Taking into account the political, ideological calling of the artistic scenes of these years, one can only hope to return to the works, interrogate the intentions of the artists, and question the validity of the oppositions expressed in the published texts and speeches on the subject.

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least among the artists we have chosen—an openness toward international art." During a trip to the GDR in October 1979, before which she was guaranteed the freedom to choose works, Bernadette Contensou visits five exhibitions: in Dresden, Leipzig, and Halle, "huge district events" bringing together the artists living in the region, from the most famous and the most official of the GDR to the youngest generations, displaying their most recent work. In Berlin, the thirty-year exhibition traces an historical panorama of the plastic arts since the foundation of the GDR.

31

Moscow–Paris–Havana–Mexico, 1945–60

Serge Fauchereau

In the Soviet Union, socialist realism is the official doctrine from which people can hardly escape. Since the 1930s, this is most evident in the visual arts. Artists such as Gerasimov devote themselves to magnifying the cult of Stalin and celebrating the success of his regime in every area, as well as the happiness of the entire population. The artists not in possession of the rare talents of Deyneka merely present a sycophantic naturalism, a new Soviet academicism. The other cultural sectors obey the new order, expurgating the literature of authors or ideas regarded to be reactionary, or producing films that do not hesitate to portray historical untruths. Following Zhdanov, who drags Anna Akhmatova and Mikhail Zoshchenko through the mud, many socialist realist writers rush to defend the official national culture. Konstantin Simonov, Alexander Fadeyev, and other lesser known figures attack cosmopolitanism and any interest people may have in foreigners. In 1947, Fadeyev cites Rainer Maria Rilke as an example of these mystical and harmful foreigners. However, so as not to contradict international Marxism, a point is made of applauding a few foreigners with clear social concerns and sympathies for "left-wing ideas": Bertolt Brecht, Romain Rolland, Louis Aragon, Nicolas

Guillén. Even some Americans are commended, despite the defamation campaign targeted at the United States during the entirety of the Cold War and well beyond: Upton Sinclair, Theodore Dreiser, Richard Wright, the singer Paul Robeson and, later, the painter Rockwell Kent. They were to be set in contrast to those classed, right up to the period 1978–82 when I was staying in the USSR, as the "major enemies of the Soviet Union": Arthur Koestler, George Orwell, and, above all, André Gide.

The large majority of Western communist intellectuals accept the edicts of Moscow. One of the most listened to is without a doubt Aragon, especially as he is such a prolific writer, with the kind of audience that painters such as Picasso or Fernand Léger cannot claim to have. The former surrealist had opted for realism from the 1930s; during the Cold War, his political convictions were to move him to reject everything that was not representational. In *Europe* and *Les Lettres françaises*, as well as *La Nouvelle Critique*, he would be seen fighting a battle on two fronts. Rejecting the experimental literature of old, he advocates a return to the novel and to traditional prosody. And in opposition to abstract art and what he, in 1947, calls "criticism idolizing abstractionism," he declares that "nonrepresentational art, whether it calls itself *abstract* or *concrete*, appears . . . to have already wreaked considerable havoc on minds yearning for painting"[1] at a time when, in *Les Lettres françaises*, the critic Léon Degand is still—but was not to remain for long—an ardent champion of abstract art. The artist that Aragon does defend at the time is André Fougeron, a committed communist painter, whom he soon believes to be insufficiently explicit for the taste of the masses—perhaps under the more insistent influence of Zhdanov's theories which he celebrates in an obituary in *Les Lettres françaises* on 9 September 1948 under the enormous heading: "Zhdanov and Us": "Perhaps many a French intellectual who never understood, or—it must be said—even knew Zhdanov's theories well, his views that were so progressive and ahead of their time, will go back to his writing about music, art or philosophy." Again in 1953, he would return to socialist realism according to Zhdanov whose "true and historically concrete nature of this artistic representation of reality has to be combined with the duty of ideological transformation and the education of the masses in the

1 Louis Aragon, *Chroniques de la pluie et du beau temps* (Paris: Les Editeurs français réunis, 1979), 194.

spirit of socialism."[2] Of course, the surrealists around André Breton are of quite a different opinion. The most consistently ferocious is Benjamin Péret, who refuses to see art or poetry involved in any party whatsoever, and least of all the Communist Party, which he denounces once again in the surrealist review *Néon* in May 1948: "Stalinism, which is engaged in the business of generally corrupting ideas and consciences, presents a completely different view as it does not need ideas or consciences, it needs religious adoration and blind submission to the *Führer* of the Kremlin represented by his national bishops with their whole entourage of priests like Aragon."[3] The poems that Aragon and Paul Eluard addressed to Stalin would not fail to inspire the anger of the surrealists (Tristan Tzara, also a communist and exposed to attacks by the surrealists, would not involve his poetry in the celebration of Stalin). In 1949, the revelations of a Russian political refugee disputed by the communist orthodoxy bring turmoil to the intellectual world; this was the Kravchenko Affair and the ensuing trial. This time, Péret does not take the side of either party: "The fetid boggy odor can be smelled from both sides of the bar."[4] In an atmosphere that became even more tense following this confrontation, Eluard publishes a hymn to Joseph Stalin and "his loving brain."[5] In the spring of 1950, he harshly snubs André Breton who, in an open letter, reminds him that those sentenced in the recent show trials in Prague had previously treated them as comrades and could not be traitors. At the same time, on the other side of the Atlantic, the same kind of political fundamentalism is raging with McCarthyism, the arrest of the Rosenbergs and soon the Korean War.

Mixing politics and culture, this war between the extremes is typical of the climate of the era, and the inflexibility of the positions is difficult to imagine today. Aragon is enthusiastic when presenting an exhibition of sculptures and drawings inspired by communism by Picasso at the Maison de la Pensée Française, and in 1951 Breton and Péret respond with a satiric comic strip in which they cruelly denounce Picasso as being calculating and for having sold himself to both the speculators and the Soviets: "He is waiting

2 Louis Aragon, *Le Neveu de M. Duval* (Paris: Les Editeurs français réunis, 1953), 193.
3 Benjamin Péret, *Œuvres complètes*, 7 vols. (Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1969-95), vol. 5, 194.
4 Péret, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 7, 191.
5 Paul Eluard, *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968), vol. 2, 351.

for orders from the Politburo," as the painter Salvador Dalí, who had become pro-Franco, is said to have stated.[6] The communists, therefore, have the advantage of counting among their ranks or among their fellow travelers artists who were recognized before the war. Besides Picasso and Léger, one can mention at least the tapestry-maker Lurçat, Marcel Gromaire, and, at a stretch, Matisse—the greatness of whose disputable realism is not discussed. Among the newcomers—alongside Fougeron—Boris Taslitzky (the creator of impressive drawings of Auschwitz) and Edouard Pignon respond to what the French party was expecting at the time. In 1952, Aragon travels to the USSR and returns with his "Reflections on Soviet Art," which feature across some ten or more issues of *Les Lettres françaises*. He speaks primarily of what people already know about: writers such as Mayakovsky or the Prokofiev oratorio *On Guard for Peace*. He maintains that "there are sculptors in Moscow" but he focuses on the Spaniard Alberto, a refugee in Moscow since 1938, where he moved over to socialist realism painting (in fact, Alberto does not return to sculpture until after 1956). At the end of a long piece that contains digression after digression and that, coming from the pen of a great writer, makes one sad to read, all that one learns is that he finds the "very beautiful *Victory*, by Topounidzé, which sits atop the new theater in the small town of Tchiatore in Georgia" more interesting than the "gentlemen in jackets" of Parisian statues, and that he is pleased with the trains and stations painted by a certain Gueorgui Nisski. In a line of argumentation often taken from Soviet criticism, Aragon links great realists of the previous century (Briullov, Repin) to recent winners of the Stalin Prize, justifying the latter by the former. In doing so, as he knows he is going against the chronology of the history of art in this way by defending the art of another age, he finally invokes this curious get-out clause: "I try as much as I can to defend myself against *fashions* in art, as I know that all you have to do is wait for the fashion to change in order for what is beautiful—in the old eternal sense of the word—to change with it."[7] It is sad to see Aragon give way to this kind of confusion.

6 André Breton, *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), vol. 3, 1066.

7 Only the first two of the eleven chapters of "Reflections on Soviet Art" are included in the selection in *Ecrits sur l'art moderne*. This quotation is taken from the last chapter, which appeared in *Les Lettres françaises* 408, 3 April 1952, 10.

Breton responds immediately to this series of articles with two texts with explicit titles: "Why Hide Contemporary Russian Painting from Us?" And "Socialist Realism as a Means of Moral Extermination." Besides the usual personal or ideological quarrels between them, Breton accuses Aragon of evading visual problems and, focusing on the photographs of Soviet paintings reproduced in *Les Lettres françaises*, he reveals the platitude and the conventional, forced nature of them.

Aragon is too intelligent and too well-informed to imagine that what is at stake with this art is played out between surrealism and socialist realism. A much more important antagonism sets him against completely abstract art that was dominant everywhere, in France and the rest of the Western world. The Galerie Maeght brings out the great prewar abstracts again, and the Denise René Gallery effectively defends the geometric abstraction of Vasarely or Herbin—an old, abstract, communist painter who, in 1949, published a theoretical book, *L'art non-figuratif non-objectif* (Nonrepresentational, nonobjective art). At the same time, the critic Michel Ragon supports the informal art of Fautrier or the lyrical abstraction of Soulages. And without having seen all that much of it, we already know that abstract expressionism takes pride of place in the United States.

Whether or not one approves of it, this conquering abstract art evokes scenes of another age, the patriotic scenes of Yuri Neprintsev which take us back to the era of Steinlen or Käthe Kollwitz. Therefore, Aragon abandons Soviet art somewhat in order to publish a book—*L'Exemple de Courbet* (1952)—and to look among the French for a realism that would be universally popular. He finds it in Bernard Buffet, a very young painter whose mannerism focusing on the sordid aspects of life (inspired by Francis Grüber) captivates all art lovers, both on the left and the right. This painter also allows him to celebrate a genre for which he would not be criticized, namely landscapes: "I consider, for my part, this landscape decadence to be the expression of the degradation of national spirit among the French lower middle class, from which the majority of our painters originated. This is why, in 1953, I welcome as a symptom of renaissance in this area the exhibitions of Bernard Buffet."[8] But problems were to arise in another established genre. In March 1953, as a

8 Louis Aragon, *Ecrits sur l'art moderne* (Paris: Flammarion, 1981), 103.

posthumous tribute to Stalin, he commissions Picasso to draw a portrait of the great man and publishes it on the front page of *Les Lettres françaises*. Unfortunately, the work did not appeal to the communist audience whose tastes are very academic. It must be said that Picasso was not terribly inspired, but one finds it surprising today that this portrait caused such an outcry. Disowned by the secretariat of the French Communist Party, Aragon apologizes: "My whole life I have been used to looking at pictures by Picasso, for example, with Picasso's works in mind; I lost sight of the reader who would look at it without thinking about the brush strokes and the technique. That was my mistake."[9] The orthodox figures at *La Nouvelle critique* are happy, but the old surrealist opponents can only mock. Breton writes:

> Everyone knows that Picasso's works, from their beginnings to today, are the unrestrained negation of so-called "socialist realism." The scandal of the "portrait" has no other interest than that of making it blatantly clear to all eyes the incompatibility of art with the orders of the police squad that claims to govern it.[10]

Nineteen fifty-three is a particularly tense period of the Cold War. A circular from John Foster Dulles forbids works of a "communist" nature in American cultural centers abroad, and all civil servants have to swear loyal allegiance to the US government. Convicted of espionage for the Soviet Union, the Rosenbergs are executed. Neither the death of Stalin nor the armistice in Korea bring about the slightest détente. This year, Aragon himself reports on the *Salon d'automne* in Paris. He enthusiastically calls to mind established treasures such as Picasso, Marquet, Valtat, and Kisling, and of the more recent artists, Taslitzky, Georges Rohner, Bernard Lorjou, and many others, the majority of whom are unknown to us today. The surprise comes from a long section attacking *Civilisation atlantique*, a large painting (4 x 6 m) by André Fougeron (Plate 31.1), to make it clear to him "that he is wrong. That he has left the path of realism. That this is not the way that the ideas we have in common can and should be expressed."[11] The painting is certainly

9 Ibid., 113.
10 Breton, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 3, 1097.
11 Aragon, *Ecrits sur l'art moderne*, 133.

representational, but it juxtaposes—without respecting the perspective and the scale of things—an electric chair, an SS soldier getting out of an American car, factories, coffins, miserable children, a Black and Algerian population enslaved, etc.; all edifying scenes of an unambiguous militancy. It is no great masterpiece, but—along with my British colleague Sarah Wilson—I do see in this crude portrayal a process that is ten or more years ahead of narrative representation (Erro, Télémaque, Rancillac, Arroyo, Peter Saul, etc.). This time, the critic who had amazed us with *La Peinture au défi* (1930) loses his perspicacity and only sees in it "the most academic elements of Mexican painting, the old processes of juxtaposing the surreal in paintings and photomontages."[12] This is a threefold criticism: of Mexican muralism that actually appears to have been Fougeron's inspiration for his spatial composition; of the strange combinations of surrealism (Magritte's cloudy musical instruments, Dalí's giraffes on fire, etc.); and of the constructivism of Rodchenko or Heartfield rejected by socialist realism.

In the course of the next few years, Aragon—who is well aware that he is speaking on behalf of the French communist intellectuals—continues to propose Courbet as a model painter and Victor Hugo as a model writer: "The fight for Victor Hugo is a part of the fight for realism, and the fight for realism is a part of the fight for true democracy and peace."[13] His unconditional admiration remains with Picasso and Matisse. Furthermore, we notice that he no longer systematically attaches the adjective *socialist* to the word *realism* and that he makes extensive use of the word *national*. Pierre Daix, who was editor-in-chief of *Les Lettres françaises* (1947–72) and was to leave the Communist Party in 1974, gives his account:

> With the war over, Aragon returns to socialist realism when the apolitical, abstract, rhetorical art of a new generation eludes him and when socialist realism is no longer simply justification for itself. This is why he sinks deeper into his almost unconditional apology until 1954, perhaps even 1955. The first reproduction of an abstract painting in *Les Lettres françaises* dates from that year.[14]

12 Ibid., 134.
13 Louis Aragon, *Journal d'une poésie nationale* (Lyon: Henneuse, 1954), 161.
14 Pierre Daix, *Aragon, une vie à changer* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1975), 357.

In fact, despite the process of de-Stalinization begun by Nikita Khrushchev in 1956 (which does not stop the brutal crushing of the Hungarian uprising in the same year), socialist realism stands firm in Europe—and in France in particular—no doubt because *one must not lose sight of the reader*, as put by Aragon who, in 1957, runs headlines in *Les Lettres françaises* such as "Socialist Realism Not Dead" (on the recent Soviet novel) and, shortly afterward, "New Ideas in Soviet Art?" In the latter article, we read this mawkish comment:

> Even in the paintings that are the product of an illustrative profession more closely linked to this genre of realism to which it would be improper to continue to limit socialist realism, in painting, one cannot fail to notice the modification of the themes: infinitely less bombastic, often descriptive of the intimacy of the Soviet people.

This is therefore an acknowledgement that the former Soviet art was "illustrative," "bombastic": all these Lenins and Stalins in favorable situations, these sturdy kolkhozniks, these brave soldiers, these dynamic building sites, these merry sportsmen and sportswomen. . . . Let us note here, as an aside, that socialist realist art is in fact close to what Nazi or fascist art was, as Igor Golomshtok has shown in his book *Totalitarian Art* (1990), however, it must not be forgotten that at the same time, official French or American art also shows an abundance of robust farmers, brave soldiers, etc. The change observed by Aragon concerns a change in Soviet society, of which he gives this ingenuous example: "Today the climate is such that, on Nikolski Boulevard for example, I have seen couples kissing in public, in a manner that is entirely natural and that is by no means shocking to us, but that would have been unthinkable not so long ago."[15] In other words, the socialist realism of today is no longer what it once was—an idea that Aragon was to return to frequently. In 1959, in a speech to the Communist Youth of France, he states:

> Socialist realism, to call it by its name, is not a concept of art that is set in stone once and for all, that can be learned, that responds to formulae. So-

15 Aragon, *Ecrits sur l'art moderne*, 181.

> cialist realism, as I understand it, is not necessarily what people here call by that name, nor what every Soviet writer calls by this name. . . . For my part, I have an *open*, nondogmatic concept of socialist realism, one that allows the artist claiming to be enriched by it to enrich his art, not in an exclusive field, but wherever he finds his inspiration, subject to the critical eye of his concepts.[16]

While the Soviets made socialist realism a fixed doctrine with well-defined sources and practices, the socialist artist is invited here to freely borrow from the works of others to achieve his ends without betraying his convictions. Aragon adds that "socialist realism developed in the USSR under conditions very different to those that applied in France. . . . Hence the differences between socialist realism in the USSR and socialist realism in France, and it would be absurd to deny them. They even explain the possible *contradictions*."[17] This is the view of other communist theorists, of the Mexican Siqueiros who made the mistake of exposing it frankly to Moscow—but let us not get ahead of ourselves—and, a little later, of the Belgian painter Roger Somville. When he addresses a Soviet audience (in a speech delivered in Moscow on 28 April 1959), Aragon is more moderate in the terms he uses, warning only that "it is hardly sufficient to proclaim socialist realism as the art of the present and of the future; one must also know how to prohibit any old merchandise being given this label."[18] This is really signaling that he is distancing himself from Zhdanovism.

Realist art, like abstract art or surrealist art, can also be a refuge, a convenient pretext for hard-working artisans and for dabblers, as it has to constantly feed itself and break new ground if it does not want to keep turning out its formulas, and, according to Roger Somville (the only true European heir of Mexican muralism—see, in particular, the Hankar Metro Station in Brussels; Plate 31.2) maintain "the desire to establish a new public art linked to the living and constant realities of the class struggle."[19] The beginning of the 1960s was not

16 Louis Aragon, *J'abats mon jeu* (Paris: Les Editeurs français réunis, 1959), 137 and 140.
17 Ibid., 166. The italics are those of Aragon.
18 Ibid., 269.
19 Roger Somville, *Hop là! Les pompiers les revoilà* (Brussels: Editions du Cercle d'éducation populaire, 1975), 17.

to placate the protests of the Breton surrealists against everything that comes even remotely close to communism, Neruda or, indeed, Sartre, whereas in the communist regimes themselves, socialist realism endures more or less well—from the triptych *Zur Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung* (1961) by Werner Tübke to the generally disappointing exhibitions of official art at the Moscow Manège into the 1980s.

The story is a different one on the other side of the Atlantic, in Latin America, but we will see that it was not unfamiliar with the French explorations of the time. The major issue is the large island of Cuba, culturally and linguistically linked to the whole of Latin America and yet close to the shores of the United States. Although independent in principle, after the war Cuba is controlled politically and economically by the United States.

Since the 1920s and 1930s, the communist or the communizing influence has won over several Latin American countries. The influence of the Peruvian theorist José Carlos Maríategui has been considerable and has endured despite his premature death in 1930. A great number of intellectuals join the Communist Party or become fellow travelers along this path: writers such as the Chilean Pablo Neruda or the Brazilian Oswald de Andrade, painters such as the Argentinian Antonio Berni or the Ecuadorean Guayasamin, and the majority of Mexican artists, with the Mexican revolutionary government openly displaying its sympathies with the Bolshevik revolution from the outset. Aside from Mexico, therefore, Cuba is the country with the greatest number of key intellectuals whose political preoccupations are manifest, from Nicolas Guillén to José Lezama Lima, from Alejo Carpentier to Juan Marinello; its best artists have sojourned in Paris and are perfectly in line with the most advanced aesthetics: Eduardo Abela, who is also a popular caricaturist, Marcelo Pogolotti and Carlos Enriquez who denounce the United States's exploitation of the island since the 1930s, and Wifredo Lam, whose left-wing views are known. As before the war, the information (or propaganda) reaching the Americas from the USSR passes by Paris when it is not obtained directly from Moscow. This explains one of the differences between the Cuban communists themselves, and in particular between two former members of the *Revista de avance* (1927–30) who were very influential after the war, namely Alejo Carpentier (1904–1980), who spent a long time living in Paris, and Juan Marinello (1898–1979), who spent less time in Paris and preferred to look to Moscow.

Giving an account of a stay in the Soviet Union in 1950, Marinello insists that he admired everything there,

> from the incomparable museums to the libraries which are an impulse in the service and celebrating the triumph of the people's culture; from the rooms of the Kremlin to the tractor factory; from the Moscow underground, a wonder of art, to the kolkhozes of Georgia, a wonder of justice; from the stones of Stalingrad, symbols of a past defeat, to the Red Square, triumph of tomorrow.[20]

Without disdaining the factories and the agriculture, Carpentier feels more qualified to speak about concerts and exhibitions. The indigenist Latin American figures and socialist realism inspire him less than the contemporary art he sees in Parisian galleries. Throughout his regular articles one often comes across the celebrities of the moment, such as Matisse, Picasso, Léger, and Braque, but also Kandinsky, Mondrian, Kupka, or Pevsner, and faced with these radical abstract painters, he calls to mind in 1952 that "as always where art is concerned, everything depends on the quality of the result. A good abstract painting will always be better than a badly painted native American woman." Again he is to admit that it is not easy to judge because "one person in a hundred is aware of the distance separating the creation of a Vasarely from the work of any old technician who thinks he is a painter."[21] For his part, and without ever attacking Aragon and socialist realism, he continues to prefer Arp or Miró to Bernard Buffet. In 1958, Carpentier becomes filled with enthusiasm for the minimalist painting of the Polish unists (Strzeminski, Stażewski) exhibited by the Denise René Gallery. However, in the same year, Marinello delivers a completely contrary speech in a small book he is to publish in Argentina, *Conversations avec nos peintres abstraits*. In it, he condemns not only abstraction, but also cubism and surrealism, as "a persistent aberration" and concludes with the words: "The illegitimacy of the abstractionist theory—which is born, according to its principal theoretician, from a reactionary position—leads to a decisive negation of the social meaning of art."[22]

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20 Juan Marinello, *Commentarios al arte* (Havana: Editorial Letras cubanas, 1983), 302.
21 Alejo Carpentier, *Artes visuales III* (Havana: Editorial Letras cubanas, 1993), 41 and 134.
22 Marinello, *Comentarios al arte*, 63 and 82. The theoretician in question is Kandinsky.

The seizure of power in Cuba by the supporters of Fidel Castro is a major event that completely changes people's consciences in Latin America, but it does not change the differing views of Carpentier and Marinello, who continue to rule over art criticism in their country. This is due to the fact that the Cuban revolutionaries did not impose an artistic norm. As long as the artist does not express any views against the revolution and communist ideas, he is free to adopt an aesthetic to his own taste—but is in trouble if any dissident expressions are revealed. In 1967, the regime is still liberal enough for Cuba to invite young painters to the *Salon de mai* (Arroyo, Erro, Monory, Rancillac, etc.), as well as surrealists and writers who may be anticommunist (Michel Leiris, Maurice Nadeau). This liberalism deludes people less and less as the regime begins to toughen up and turn toward dictatorship with the help of the Soviet Union. But in 1970, Marinello still judges art according to Lenin's view, "truth and example."[23] In 1980, a Cuban critic celebrates the fact that "in Cuba, *committed* art has not been the special privilege of the epic painters." In it, one sees "the most delicate lyrics, the explorers of the depths of the subconscious, the painters of landscapes and flowers, and also the coldest and most convulsively subjective abstracts."[24] In other words, everything is possible if one does not criticize the regime; the landscapes and the flowers are as neutral as abstract art and question nothing.

Across the Latin American world, the Soviet presence in Cuba is regarded in varying lights; the most favorable sometimes think that there was little point in getting rid of the Americans only to have the Russians in their place. In Peru in 1970, the Hora Zero group exclaims in its review: "We share completely the postulates of Marxist-Leninism and we applaud the Cuban revolution." But there are already doubts about this revolution, and the Peruvian José B. Adolph replies that he wants "neither the Ivory Tower nor the Lenin Tower." At the time, many intellectuals share this view.

In Mexico, history takes a different course as the Mexican revolution brings to power a regime advocating a type of socialism in affinity with the Russian revolution, but that is not prepared to adopt its practices. Its independence becomes apparent when Trotsky, who was sent into exile by Stalin, is welcomed in 1937 and put up by Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera. This is where Breton comes

23 Ibid., 231.
24 Gerardo Mosquera, *Exploraciones en la plastica cubana* (Havana: Editorial Letras cubanas, 1983), 456.

to meet him in 1938, and where they together write the manifesto "For Independent Revolutionary Art." But the following year, Rivera—who had never stopped attacking Stalinism—has a falling out with Trotsky. His muralist colleague Siqueiros, who is devoted to Stalin, attempts to assassinate Trotsky in 1940. He is arrested, but with the help of Neruda he escapes to Chile. He returns to Mexico in 1944 after having visited several countries in South America and Cuba. He publishes *Ours Is the Only Way* (1945), in which he celebrates Rivera, who inspired the muralist movement, and José Clemente Orozco, the "first anti-fascist artist of Mexico and perhaps even the continent"[25]—but Orozco is fiercely independent and does not allow himself to be won over by the Communist Party. In 1947, Siqueiros is more severe toward his colleagues and accuses Orozco of "political confusionism (nihilist liberalism)" and Rivera of "stagnation in terms of technique and materials."[26] Moreover, he loathes the painter Rufino Tamayo and the writer Luís Cardoza y Aragón, close to Parisian surrealism. Indeed, the position of Siqueiros is clearly Stalinist, but he is a great inventive painter and he is not prepared to sacrifice himself to socialist realism according to Moscow. On the contrary, he denounces "the persistence, the stagnation of the theories, of the material techniques and the styles" and concludes peremptorily that "it is inevitable that an archaic technique can only produce archaic shapes and emotions."[27] The man who, since the 1930s, has reformed the traditional perspective to adapt it to mural art, the man who is a supporter of new techniques (projectors, aerographs, airbrushing) and new materials (pyroxylin, sculpto-painting), believes it to be an integral kind of art as, in his words, "the separation of sculpture, painting, stained glass windows, etc., from architecture was a natural consequence of the individualist concepts."[28] This revolutionary conception of art implicitly rejects all the academicism being practiced at the time in Soviet art. He also explicitly rejects the "one-eyed" art coming from Paris, that is to say, surrealism, abstract art and all new trends in the Parisian scene of which the champions are Cardoza y Aragón, the painters Tamayo and Carlos Mérida, and the poets of the review *Contemporaneos*,[29] with whom the diatribes were to be never-ending.

25 David A. Siqueiros, *L'art et la révolution* (Paris: Editions sociales, 1973), 72.
26 Ibid., 19.
27 Ibid., 20 and 111.
28 Ibid., 115.
29 *Palabras de Siqueiros* (Mexico: Fonds de Cultura economica, 1996), 293.

The congresses for peace are the opportunity for communist intellectuals to travel and meet. Picasso, who hardly travels, makes the journey to Wroclaw in 1948. In 1949, Paul Eluard goes to Mexico where he meets Siqueiros. The latter comes to Paris in 1951 to speak at the Maison de la Pensée Française, where he is presented by Eluard. On this occasion, Péret protests in the weekly journal *Arts*: "Is he just a painter?" He sets him against Tamayo, whose first Parisian exhibition in 1950 had a preface written by Breton. Péret reiterates this protest in 1952 in the pamphlet *To the Assassin*, in which he once again denounces the painter as an assassin and "a police agent (who) has just spent several months behind the Iron Curtain."[30] This new attack comes on the occasion of an exhibition of Mexican art at the Museum of Modern Art in Paris.

The former surrealist Philippe Soupault—who had already dedicated an enthusiastic article to this exhibition on its opening in 1952—later returns to the subject in a long piece written for the journal *XXe siècle*[31] because he has noticed that the painters working in Paris have patently spurned the new style of Mexican art in its gigantic proportions: "Like ostriches, they have preferred not to see it and not to admire it."[32] Soupault knew Rivera, Orozco, and Siqueiros personally; he had met them and had seen their frescoes just after the war. What appeals to him in this kind of art, more than its social commitment, is the fact that it is not mercenary and is intended for everyone—whereas he sees Tamayo returning to the conventional canvas painting—and it remains close to its mass audience. "The art dealers in Paris were not able to speculate on the frescoes of the monuments in Mexico,"[33] he was to say later. The essential elements of these arguments appeal to Siqueiros when he hears about them. He responds immediately in a marathon conference held at the Palace of Fine Arts in Mexico: "Salutary presence of Mexican art in the formalist capital of France: conclusions on an article by Philippe Soupault." Siqueiros laments the fact that Soupault's text appeared in a luxury review, "destined for an elite (probably an intellectually and culturally

30 *Tracts surréalistes et déclarations collectives* (Paris: Eric Losfeld éditeur, 1982), vol. 2, 125.

31 No. 4, 1954.

32 Soupault, Philippe. "Une tâche gigantesque," *Ecrits sur l'art du XXe siècle* (Paris: Editions Cercle d'art, 1994), 263. This article was translated into Spanish in the Mexican review *Arte publico* 2 (November 1954).

33 Philippe Soupault, *Vingt mille et un jours: Interviews with Serge Fauchereau* (Paris: Belfond, 1980), 197.

degraded elite)," but he acknowledges that it has "a special importance, as the author is neutral, someone who could not be taken for a man of the left and who would by no means pass as a procommunist," and congratulates him for having confirmed "that our movement is more important than anything else currently being produced in Europe; that the public art, the monumental art of our movement is standing up to the pettiness of private art in Europe; that in the face of the geometric and purely decorative dehumanization of the Paris School, our movement is affirming, for the greatest benefit of Mexico and the other countries under the capitalist regime, the value of representational art, consistently realist and expressing in many areas genuinely modern intentions."[34] Siqueiros arranges the facts to suit him. Besides the fact that Soupault, while not a communist, is a man of the left and was a great member of the antifascist resistance, he puts words into his mouth, and uses these words to settles old scores, far from the poet's line of argument. He says he admires the engravings of Posada and the muralists, and yet Soupault, who was a friend of Delaunay and Kandinsky, never condemned the abstract art of Mérida. And if he is worried about Tamayo, it is not about his art, but about his reluctance concerning public art. Siqueiros's anger is targeted at formalist art, or abstract, noncommitted art of which Carlos Mérida is the best representative. He also criticizes painters such as Raúl Anguiano and Carlos Orozco Romero—who are not abstract artists—for being openly neutral and noncommunist. But most of his accusations are directed against Tamayo, the "informer" in the pay of the United States. All of this is oversimplified and tendentious. Siqueiros is a very great painter, but in his writings his faith gains the upper hand.

In the course of the 1940s, Diego Rivera becomes closer to Siqueiros. They share the same rejection of abstraction and surrealism, and the same enemies: the "genius" Tamayo, Breton, "politically degenerated to the point of falling into Trotskyist existentialism," or Cardoza y Aragón, "who went to Moscow to give himself a certain red hue and to cultivate friendships with the intellectual revolutionaries of Paris"[35] and, he adds, who is the opposite of Aragon. Nonetheless, he makes a few cutting remarks to his muralist colleagues:

34 Siqueiros, *L'art et la révolution*, 187 and 188.
35 Diego Rivera, *Arte y politica* (Mexico: Editorial Grijalbo, 1979), 332 and 334.

the confusionism of Orozco (who died in 1949) that simultaneously presents Hitler and Stalin as clowns and Marx as a gnome dancing with a copy of *Das Kapital*; and he claims that Siqueiros committed "some flirtations with formalism and abstraction."[36] Siqueiros does in fact admit to painting a few abstract pieces, but only to describe them as "exercises."[37] This is in 1952. That same year, Rivera sends a request to the Communist Party of Mexico to be readmitted, humbly acknowledging "all his political mistakes."[38] He was to be readmitted at the end of 1954.

Although Rivera, Siqueiros, and other less visible Mexican artists conform to the line of Stalinism, this definitely does not mean that they adopt Zhdanovian socialist realism. During a stay in the Soviet Union in 1955, Siqueiros reads to the Soviet Academy of Art an "open letter to the Soviet painters, sculptors, and engravers." Courageously or naively, after the obligatory compliments, he tells them honestly what he thinks of their aesthetics and their practices. I have chosen a few sentences that speak for themselves. Your painting, he writes,

> suffers from a different kind of *cosmopolitanism* represented by *formalist academicism* and a *mechanical realism*. . . . *Realism*—and you can admit this to me—cannot be a *set formula*, an immutable law, as the entire history of art shows. . . . With you, in Soviet painting, such a lapse of memory appears evident in your perpetuation of *outdated realist styles that correspond to a recent past*, similar to *the realism of the Yankee commercial advertising of the beginning of the century*. . . . There have not yet been any supporters of an enrichment of material techniques to emerge among you. . . . The Soviet painters remain linked to methods of composition and perspective common to all artistic activities throughout the world.[39]

Siqueiros is perhaps not aware of the harshness of his criticism. When his article still has not been published more than a year afterward, despite what was agreed, Siqueiros complains. He receives the following response: "The

36 Ibid., 331 and 333.
37 Siqueiros, *L'art et la révolution*, 267.
38 Rivera, *Arte y politica*, 339.
39 Siqueiros, *L'art et la révolution*, 211–18. The italics are those of Siqueiros.

prevailing conditions in the Soviet Union have made publication impossible, as we do not want to create problems between the people currently running the Union of Painters."[40] From this moment on, realism as understood by the Soviets was to be increasingly called into question, to such an extent that Diego Rivera—shortly before his death and yet still anxious not to offend Moscow—declared in 1957: "The theory of 'socialist realism' was established *a posteriori* by the professional theorists, based on the views of bureaucrats, who are of course anxious to retain their position and their salary."[41] In 1958, a major debate takes place in Mexico on the occasion of the First Inter-American Biennial. As the process of decolonization was well under way across the world at the time, the painters willingly associated their actions with this: "the development of Mexican painting is the equivalent of the anticolonial struggle of the people of the world at this time," says Chávez Morado. "This is why I believe that we must unite our art and show it to the people of Asia and Africa."[42] This program is all the more ambitious considering that many of the artists present have an unquestionably reactionary attitude. Despite a few moderates, such as Raúl Anguiano and Juan O'Gorman, comrade González Camarena is a great success when harshly mocking Mondrian, Van Doesburg, Klee, and even Picasso. O'Gorman protests that "Picasso's contribution to the visual arts is of crucial importance; his rebellion, like that of Paul Klee, adds poetic elements of great importance that we cannot belittle without good reason." But Chávez Morado insists: "I believe that the rebellion of Picasso, Klee, Kandinsky, and so many others is nihilistic; and this leads to destruction, despite the individual talent of the creators." Such exchanges show that the arguments of a "steered" realist movement (Siqueiros's expression) are not in harmony with the course of history.

This is no longer the morning after the Mexican revolution and the government's attitude has changed considerably. In 1960, Siqueiros expresses his distress over this in the auditorium of the University of Caracas:

40 *Palabras de Siqueiros*, 406.
41 Rivera, *Arte y politica*, 405.
42 *Documentación sobre el arte mexicano* (Mexico: Fondo de cultura economica, 1974), 106.

> Look at the close relationship that exists between the political and cultural attitudes of the government. The government of Mexico is no longer interested in muralism, it doesn't want it anymore; it no longer wants art that makes political statements. The governments of Mexico over the past twenty years no longer want this. The governments of the blatant counterrevolution no longer want us to remind the people of Mexico about the Zapata program.[43]

At the University of Caracas, he sees a campus with the very abstract sculptures of Jean Arp, of Jesus Soto (and does he not know that the Madi group of Argentinian abstract artists claims to have its roots in Marxism?). Siqueiros wants, therefore, to show himself to be conciliatory toward abstract art, forgetting that he was one of the people to attack the painter Mérida or the sculptor Cueto: "They seriously slandered Mexico while claiming we persecuted abstract painters. Pure lies."[44] On his return to Mexico, he runs a campaign against the Mexican government that he believes has sold itself to the capital of US imperialism. Accused of stirring up trouble, he is arrested in August 1960 and sentenced to eight years in prison (he would only serve four, in conditions allowing him to paint). There are international protests in his favor and a tribute exhibition is organized in 1962 in Paris, where the works of Fougeron, Pignon, Somville, and Taslitzky could be seen, but also those of older artists such as Giacometti, Léger, Lurçat, Marquet, Masereel, Masson, Survage, and Zadkine. However, a counteroffensive condemning Siqueiros comes from the surrealists and from members of the Cobra group, as well as key figures from the noncommunist left (André Frénaud, Edgar Morin, Maurice Nadeau, Pierre Naville, Denise René). This small quarrel is merely a minor epilogue in a row that had become anachronistic.

43 Ibid., 130.
44 Siqueiros, *L'art et la révolution*, 221.

32

A Dying Colonialism, a Dying Orientalism: Algeria, 1952

Sarah Wilson

> Each person knows that governments have done precisely all they can to organize amnesia. Amnesia about the reality of the colonial system, the struggles and sacrifices made by an entire people who rose up to break their chains. Amnesia and silence around an atrocious war into which tens of thousands of young Frenchman were drawn against their will.
>
> —Henri Alleg, 2009[1]

In December 2009, the Nelson Mandela library in the communist municipality of Vitry-sur-Seine outside Paris held a modest exhibition: *Two Painters in Algeria on the Verge of Insurrection, 1951–1952: Mireille Miailhe/Boris Taslitzky*. The catalog preface by Alleg added prestige: in 1958, as a communist militant and director of the daily newspaper *Alger républicain*, Alleg

1 "Chacun sait bien que les gouvernements ont justment tout fait pour organiser l'oubli. L'oubli de ce que fut le système colonial, des combats et des sacrifices menés par tout un peuple dressé pour briser ses chaînes. L'oubli et le silence autour d'une guerre atroce dans laquelle furent entraînés contre leur gré des dizaines de milliers de jeunes Français" (Henri Alleg). In Anissa Bouayed, ed., *Un voyage singulier. Deux peintres en Algérie à la veille de l'insurrection 1951–1952. Mireille Miailhe/Boris Taslitzky* (Paris: Art et mémoire au Maghreb, 2009), 8.

became world news after his account of torture in *La Question*.[2] Taslitzky died at the age of ninety-four in 2005; Miailhe in 2010. Alleg is thus one of the "last survivors" whose engagement with the struggles of colonial peoples adds to the exceptional narrative of Communism's relationship with France. The painful narrative of decolonization cannot be told here. However, the definition of conquered territories as "greater France," *la plus grande France*, adds another dimension to the notion of "art beyond borders in communist Europe." The trip to Algeria by Taslitzky and Miailhe offers us a *punktum*—an eloquent moment which deconstructs the colonial narrative.

The story of socialist realism in France is becoming more familiar.[3] The strategic nature of decision making for the French Communist Party (PCF), beholden at this time to the Comintern and a nationwide electorate in France, must be emphasized. A campaign such as the *Algérie 1952* show involved the Communist Parties of both France and Algeria (the PCA). It was part of a global network of cultural operations that spread via press coverage and filmed reportage, involving the intellectual prestige of artists such as Pablo Picasso and the poets Louis Aragon and Pablo Neruda. The efficiency of painting exhibitions—so cheap to produce—should be underlined, particularly in a context where personal domestic television was as rare in Mediterranean countries as it was in Eastern Europe.

In Paris, the exhibition at the Galerie Weil in January 1953 demonstrates that the attention of the PCF was turning from Indochina to Algeria. This followed the arguable failure of Picasso's painting *Massacre in Korea* at the May Salon of 1951, but the scandalous success of the Autumn Salon, where five paintings lambasting French policy in Indochina were taken off the walls by the police—with substantial press reaction. *Algérie 1952* also repeated the successful strategy of a show aimed at the workforce and staged at the heart of Paris's bourgeois art world, prior to a tour of Eastern European satellite countries. Politically, it was designed to intervene in the national debate on Algeria during the brief period when the PCF's domination of the anticolonial argu-

2 Alleg's *Retour sur la question, Entretien avec Gilles Martin* (Paris: Le Temps des Cerises, 2001) was displayed in the 2009 exhibition.

3 I included the movement in *Paris, Capital of the Arts, 1900–1968* (London, Royal Academy, Bilbao, Guggenheim Museum, 2002–3); see also Sarah Wilson, "French Socialist Realism, 1945–1970," in *Socialist Realisms: Soviet Painting, 1920–1970*, ed. Matthew Cullerne Bown (Rome: Palazzo delle Esposizioni, 2010); *Artistes & métallos* (Paris: Institut d'Histoire sociale-CGT, 2011).

ment had become a powerful recruiting machine (initially hostile, even Jean-Paul Sartre now adopted the party; he would be faithful until the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956). However, two months after the exhibition ended, Stalin's unanticipated death in March 1953 left the PCF in political disarray. Subsequently embarrassed by the scandal around Picasso's obituary portrait of Stalin, the party's attention was diverted from Algeria. By the Autumn Salon of 1953, socialist realist history paintings on a grand scale would be publically disavowed. Henceforth a strategy of ostensible de-Stalinization would emphasize the *politique de la grandeur française*: a patriotic rhetoric of "French grandeur" that sat uncomfortably with the previous anticolonialist stance.[4]

Algérie 1952 occasioned the last grand history paintings in the French orientalist tradition. Here, Miailhe's status is crucial (Plate 32.1). She is surely France's greatest female socialist realist painter. Yet the anathema associated with the term *réalisme socialiste* became all too clear, when after the richest of personal encounters, her distress lead to the withdrawal of both my article and her drawings from a major Parisian retrospective exhibition on Algeria in 1992.[5] Anissa Bouayed, organizer of the Vitry-sur-Seine show of 2009, also took care to establish a distance: "Formally, we are also far from socialist realism, for there is no presupposed or restricting framework here," she declared. The drawings and small oil sketches displayed were essentially preparatory studies in the Beaux-Arts tradition. Significantly, the huge canvases shown at the Galerie Weil exhibition in 1953 were not indicated in the 2009 catalog. The paintings' romantic lineage argues, in France at least, for a redefinition of socialist realism involving subject matter and time frame (including questions around realism and anachronism) rather than "style" itself and, as I conclude, the European language of painting itself was problematic in a colonial context.[6]

"On the very sites where Chasseriau, Delacroix, Eugène Fromentin and Constantin Guys were intoxicated with the miracle of the Orient, its fanta-

4 See Danièle Joly, "The PCF and the 'Grandeur' of the French Nation" in her *The French Communist Party and the Algerian War* (London: Macmillan, 1991), 56–60. She quotes Roger Garaudy, "Qu'est-ce que la grandeur française?" *Clarté* (October 1958): 58.

5 See Laurent Gervereau et al., eds., *La France en guerre d'Algérie* (Paris: BDIC, 1992). "Femmes d'Algérie, femmes françaises, autour de Mireille Miailhe" (suppressed), should have complemented Christian Derouet's text on Taslitzky (which occasioned the artist's donation to the Centre Pompidou).

6 Contemporary realisms from Balthus and Jean Hélion to Bernard Buffet or the political expressionism of Bernard Lorjou form part of this context.

sias and its exotic dancers, two great artists of our times, discovering the unfathomable misery of a people, celebrate its hopes and battles" wrote the communist art critic Jean Rollin in 1953.[7] The depiction of the Orient was as old as colonialism itself: military and topographical imperatives preceded "orientalism" proper. The picturesque tradition subsequently extended from exotic landscapes to the realm of the sexualized feminine—where the academic nude, as odalisque or *almée* (singer, dancer, poetess) was reframed within the imagined excess of the harem—the dream that was the "Other" of colonial reality.[8] *Algérie 1952* is a *détournement* of that tradition, a demonstration of its misrepresentations: via explicit reference to Delacroix it brought political "reality" onto the dream-territory of the painted surface. Life under colonial rule demonstrated a *symbolic* violence embodied in language, while its picturing demonstrated a *systemic* violence: the "often catastrophic consequences" of the smooth functioning of the system, according to Slavoj Žižek's analysis.[9] This violence, symbolic and systemic, preceded the eruption of what the administration first named "civil disobedience," followed by guerilla tactics and the one-on-one conflict of rape or torture in the situation of the "war with no name": the *guerre sans nom*.

Among communist intellectuals and artists, Boris Taslitzky wielded great moral authority, due to his 1930s experience within the AEAR (Association of Revolutionary Writers and Artists), his closeness to Louis Aragon, and his status as a resistant and *déporté*. He had made drawings at the heart of political action from 1934 onward, through the Popular Front era and his internment in several French prison camps. His Buchenwald concentration camp drawings, translated into large Salon scale paintings, were at the root of the polemic "Picasso or Taslitzky?," which triggered a debate about art and style within the Communist Party in November 1946, before any postwar social-

7 "Aux lieux mêmes où des maîtres du siècle dernier, Chasseriau, Delacroix, Eugène Fromentin, Constantin Guys, s'enivraient au miracle de l'Orient, de ses fantasias et des ses almées, deux grands artistes de notre temps, découvrant l'insondable misère d'un peuple, célébrent ses luttes et ses espoirs.' Jean Rollin, "'*Algérie 52*,' une remarquable exposition," *Le Patriote de Sud-Ouest*, 13 January 1953.

8 See, for example, Caroline Bugler, "'Innocents Abroad': Nineteenth-Century Artists and Travellers in the Near East and North Africa," in *The Orientalists, Delacroix to Matisse: European Painters in North Africa and the Near East*, ed. Mary Anne Stevens (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1984); Jill Beaulieu and Mary Roberts, eds. *Orientalism's Interlocutors: Painting, Architecture, Photography* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2002).

9 Slavoj Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (London: Profile Books, 2008).

ist realist diktat.[10] Mireille Glodek was born in Paris, like Taslitzky, from a Jewish émigré family; she was ten years his junior. Glodek's father went back to Russia to witness the 1917 revolution, but returned to France and became a Zionist. Mané-Katz, the Paris School painter, offered Miailhe crucial encouragement and she briefly attended classes at the École des Beaux-Arts (as Taslitzky had done). The war forced her to flee to the south, where in Banyuls-sur-Mer, the model Dina Vierny introduced her to the Catalan sculptor Aristide Maillol. In 1942 she joined the Resistance in Toulouse, meeting Jean Miailhe, her future husband. The scenes of revenge and denunciation she witnessed informed her painting from 1945 to 1946. Her fascination with the tribunal—a subject that would reappear in Algeria—was transformed by Honoré Daumier's bitter satire, reinforced by his 1945 Musée Galliera retrospective in Paris, organized by the resistant Front National des Arts. The dark silhouettes of *toulousaines* seeking retribution in the courts (superimposed upon the memory of Caravaggio's mournful courtesans) were exhibited to great acclaim as *The Widows* at the "under-30s" Salon in 1946.[11]

In April 1947, Taslitzky asked her to exhibit with him.[12] In 1949 he reviewed her solo show noting "a human content turned to a ferocious critique of the world in which she lives . . . talent and a conscience."[13] A member of the Communist Party for over three years, Miailhe's work became increasingly militant. In spring 1950, she joined the team that transformed the Gresillons market at Genevilliers into a setting for the Twelfth Congress of the PCF. Here, Taslitzky's huge backdrop of a gesturing Stalin demonstrated Party orthodoxy, while leader Maurice Thorez advocated socialist realism linked to national themes. His speeches spurred the production of paintings, touring exhibitions, films, and novels, marking the high point of the movement. [14] Ironically,

10 See *Boris Taslitzky, l'arme du dessin* (Paris: Musée d'Art et d'Histoire du Judaisme, 2006); *Boris Tastlitzky* (Saint Arnoult-en-Yvelines: Maison Elsa-Triolet-Aragon, 2009); *Boris Taslitzky. Dessins faits à Buchenwald* (Paris: Biro, 2009), and boris-taslitzky.fr/accueil.htm.

11 See Pascale Froment and Isabelle Rollin-Royer, *Mireille Glodek Miailhe* (Paris: Biro, 2007).

12 See *4 peintres/Amblard/Glodek-Miailhe/Laforêt/Taslitzky* (Paris: La Gentilhommière, 1947).

13 Boris Taslitzky, "Un contenu humain orienté sur une critique féroce du monde dans lequel elle vit. . . . talent et conscience," *France d'Abord* (December 1949) on Miailhe's show, Galerie du Bac, 19 November to 23 December 1949.

14 *Le don des militants* (Montreuil: Musée d'histoire vivante, 2009) demonstrated the fiftieth birthday cult of personality around Thorez (imitating Stalin). See also Annette Wieviorka, *Maurice et Jeannette, Biographie du couple Thorez* (Paris: Fayard, 2010), 437–55.

most took place in his absence: gravely ill, he left France for the USSR in November 1950.

During 1951, meticulous planning involved contact between the PCF and its Algerian counterpart to organize itineraries and the 400,000 francs budget for travel, subsistence, and materials. The Algerian Communist Party expressly requested a female complement to Taslitzky to venture where men were forbidden. Miailhe and Taslitzky were in Algiers by January 1952; the trip was semi-clandestine. He traveled eastward from Algiers to Oran, Beni-Saf, Ain-Témouchant, Sidi-bel-Abbès, Tlemcen, then far across to the west: to Constantine, down to Biskra, Djema Setif, and back to Algiers. Miailhe covered Algiers itself. Accompanied, as she recalled, by a Jewish *pied noir* (an Algerian-born guide of settler origin), she visited the streets of the Casbah, the slums, the port where the dockers loaded up at dawn, and various families in both the Arab and European communities.

Traveling to Blida in February, she managed to attend the trial of the "56 de Blida"—fifty-six nationalists, of the clandestine OS (Special Organization)—by befriending women in the defendants' families. Like the nineteenth-century painter Henriette Brown, or later, Lucie Ranvier-Chartier, Elisabeth Faure, or Jeanne Thil, she was highly conscious of the tensions between reportage and her artistic heritage.[15] Yet whereas the object of a nineteenth-century female orientalist was to penetrate the harem in native dress, Miailhe, veiled and in the djellaba, sketchbook hidden in its folds, was smuggled into the courtroom to depict the confrontation between defendants and *gendarmes*. "I make my drawings discreetly. French lawyers are there to defend the accused."[16] In *Tribunal*, the viewer takes up the position of these female spectators: a confrontation of the sexes is implicit.

In Cherchell, Miailhe was taken by her guide Mustapha to his home. She witnessed the life of an extended Muslim family, small-time cultivators, who themselves employed agricultural workers, including children. The women in the family were illiterate; the boys attended the École Communale; the

15 France created an École des Beaux-Arts d'Alger in 1881; the Villa Abd-el Tif was set up as an equivalent of the Villa de Medici in Rome; see Michèle Lefrançois, "Art et aventure au féminin," *Coloniales 1920–1940* (Paris: Musée Municipal de Boulogne Billancourt, 1989), 53–65; and for Henriette Browne, see Raina Lewis, *Gendering Orientalism, Race, Femininity and Representation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996).

16 "Je dessine discrètement—des avocats français sont là pour la défense des accusés." Letter to the author, 9 December 1991.

second son, a nationalist, was the treasurer of the National Liberation Front (FLN), which was at the time breaking away from the PCA. She was then invited to join the touring electoral campaign of communist deputy Pierre Fayet, with Mustapha and a chauffeur. They visited Boghail, Djelfa, Laghouat, and Bou-Saada, where, appalled at the sight of starving children, Miailhe took photographs, not as an *aide-mémoire* for her painting, but as irrefutable evidence: "the same misery everywhere" she recalled. Returning to Algiers she linked up again with *Alger Républicain* and Henri Alleg (who had welcomed her), before flying back to France. "I arrived morally shattered and out of things—certain that grave events were in preparation."[17] The arduous task of working small sketches into finished paintings began: Miailhe's largest canvas, *Young Agricultural Workers in the Area around Algiers*, would be 3 x 2 meters in scale.

In June 1952, the communist illustrated magazine *Regards* published a special number on North Africa. The editorial declared: "The conquest of Algeria was one of the most cynical cases of organized pillage of the last century. . . . The conquest and the repression of rebellion were accompanied by terrible massacres. . . . The spectacle of the misery of the North African people is one of the most poignant in the world."[18] The artists' photographs and drawings were used to illustrate the article "Guided by a Blind Boy," by Resistance heroine and journalist Madeleine Riffaud (sent out on a reportage by the CGT trades' union federation). A book, *Deux peintres et un poète retour d'Algerie*, with Jacques Dubois's poem appeared in July. Here, Taslitzky's sketches of striking dockers, militants, children of the shantytown *bidonvilles* appeared first. In 2009, the characters still spoke vividly to Alleg: Hadj Omar, a communist veteran of the 1919 Black Sea mutiny; Kalif Chabana, a peasant who lost a limb in the appalling Sétif massacres on 8 May 1945 (France's liberation day); Tahar Ghomri, a communist peasant from Tlemcen who would later die in the maquis.[19]

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17 "J'arrive abassourdie et un peu déphasée mais certaine que des événements durs se préparent." Ibid.

18 "La conquête de l'Algérie a été une des plus cyniques entreprises de rapine du siècle dernier. . . La conquête et la repression ont été accompagnés de massacres effroyables. . . Le spectacle de la misère du peuple en Afrique du Nord est un des plus poignants qui soit au monde." Pierre Courtade, "Que se passe-t-il en Afrique du Nord?" *Regards* 350 (June 1952). See also Madeleine Riffaud, "Guidée par un aveugle," *Regards* 350 (June 1952).

19 Alleg, *Retour sur la question*, 9.

Miailhe's work followed. In the crude, rushed printing job, her notes were left visible. Goya joined Daumier in her sketches: the long crayoned titles such as *Cité Mahédinne in Algiers: Seven Drinking Fountains for 30,000 People* acknowledged the tradition of Goya's *Disasters of War*. In *The Administration Has Just Passed By*, a homeless woman crouches among boulders, sheltered by the planks of her demolished shack; she draws her meager garments around her. *Her Neighbor: It's Here She'll Give Birth in a Few Days' Time* recaptures a snatch of conversation between Miailhe, her female guide, and the woman whose interior they enter. Jagged black contours conveyed anger: *88% of Children without a School*. Drawings dramatized with fluid wash were more typically "orientalist": the squatting woman in *Woman and Child*, or the cluster of figures in *Pause at Noon, It's the Colon Who Sells the Bread*, recalling similar figures in watercolor by Delacroix or Gerôme. The rough sketch of the *Child with Trachoma* conveys the anxiety of Miailhe's own professional gaze: the boy's right eye, upturned, remains opaque. The inevitable relationship between pathos and voyeurism, blindness and insight, is here at its most problematic.

A lithograph of *"Algeria Will Be Free": The Arrival of the 56 Patriots at the Blida Tribunal* was sold at the Fête de l'Humanité of 1952. *Deux peintres et un poète* was signed by Taslitzky at the National Writers' book sale at Paris's famed Vel d'Hiv, in October. Miailhe's *Group of Young Arabs in Rags* was accepted for the Tuileries Salon but officially removed before the opening. The huge *Young Agricultural Workers in the Area around Algiers* was refused at the Autumn Salon—but illustrated in the journal *La Patrie* with due outrage and publicity.[20] Provocation in painting was linked to publicity-generating events. *Algérie 1952* would repeat for Algeria what the Autumn Salon scandal of 1951 had attempted for Indochina, when the police removed seven canvases, including Taslitzky's *Port de Bouc* (Tate Modern), from the walls prior to the official presidential visit to the Salon. The date—6 November 1951—was chosen to found the association to defend and commemorate Maréchal Pétain, France's head of state under German occupation.[21] These

20 See Jean Rollin, "Triomphe du réalisme au Salon d'Automne," *La Patrie*, 9 November 1952, with a photograph of Miailhe's painting.

21 Louis Aragon, *Le Scandale du Salon d'Automne, L'Art et le Sentiment National* (Paris: Les Lettres Françaises et Tous les Arts, 1951). See my essay "Voids, Palimpsests, Kitsch: Paris before Klein," *Voids* [*Vide*]*s* (Paris: Editions du Centre Georges Pompidou, 2009), 192–98.

coinciding events perfectly exemplified the communists' claim of "two Frances," one capitalist, bourgeois, collaborationist, extending to the military and the police force, one proletarian, patriotic, representing national values, justifying the PCF confrontation with the government. Bourgeois art in the "imperialist" camp (read abstraction?) was likewise differentiated from socialist realism and its great history painting tradition. As Taslitzky said, "the fact that two cultures confront each other in each nation does not mean there are two national traditions."[22]

In January 1953, the exhibition of forty paintings and sixty drawings finally opened in the elegant Galerie André Weil, Avenue Matignon. The poster and invitations for *Algérie 1952* were designed by Miailhe. André Fougeron's *Mining Country* series, shown at the Bernheim-Jeunes in January 1951 set the precedent: a respected and bourgeois gallery was given over to a party painter for the exhibition of a series of critical, politically legible paintings and drawings; the opening attended by the Communist Party political and artistic élite, a campaign was orchestrated in the communist press, a working-class public was bussed in from the communist red belt around Paris, finally (after a regional showing) the works left for a tour of in Eastern Europe and were acquired by institutions in Soviet satellite countries. Two Cercle d'Art publications were produced for Fougeron: a cheap book and a luxury folder of color plates, as would be the case for *Algérie 1952*.[23]

Advance press appeared in the authoritative communist daily, *L'Humanité*. Etienne Fajon, member of the PCF Politbureau, eulogized Miailhe's *Young Agricultural Workers*; the visitors' book included Picasso's signature and touching tributes from Algerian workers and students. The right-wing Algerian press immediately denounced "Algeria sullied by communist painting . . . [as] a flagrant deformation of the truth." Government action ensued.[24] A press release declared: "By decree of the Minister of the Interior, the police service proceeded to remove the mast supporting the *Algérie 1952* exhibi-

22 Boris Taslitzky, "L'Art et les traditions nationales," *La Nouvelle Critique* 32 (January 1952): 63.

23 André Fougeron corroborated the suggestion that "Algérie '52" was created as a riposte to "Les Pays de Mines," and that the alternation of exhibitions by Fougeron and Taslitzky constituted a PCF bipartite policy (18 April 1991).

24 B, "L'Algérie éclaboussée par la peinture communiste" and "Une déformation flagrante de la verité," *Journal d'Alger*, 1 and 3 January 1953.

tion poster at 1:30 p.m. today."[25] In Algiers, 2,500 dockers acknowledged the show's success as "a work of truth and fraternity." The tribute was followed up by other dockers unions.[26]

The PCF, with its "two France" ideology, subscribed to a typically Manichaean Cold War vision—duplicated in the press. To Etienne Fajon's: "Here is Mireille Miailhe's *Women's Portrait*, their blind eyes empty with trachoma, like so many others in Algeria," the *Echo d'Alger* (a staunch defender of "French Algeria") proposed an alternative: *Ophtalmological Consultation in the Bled.* "We know (and the people know far better than we do) a whole cohort of doctors and medical auxiliaries who have devoted their lives to the struggle against trachoma."[27] The celebrated deportee and anthropologist Germaine Tillion traveled once more to Algeria from December 1954 to March 1955. She offered a dispassionate, demographic analysis of the clash between "nonadapted" and "industrialized" peoples, pitting "'Everything-that-France-has-done-in-Algeria' (hospitals, roads, port constructions, big towns, a little industry a quarter of the necessary schools) against 'Everything-that-France-has-not-done-in-Algeria' (three quarters of the necessary schools, other industries, a plan for agriculture with agrarian reform and the necessary experts)."[28] Moreover, Miailhe's uncaring *Colon*, master of the *Young Agricultural Workers*, and her Daumieresque, toad-like *gendarmes* in *Permanent Conspiracy*, raise the problem of stereotypes which Franz Fanon was to expose in 1959. His book *L'An V de la révolution algérienne*, with its deliberate reference to the French revolutionary calendar and the Terror, appeared as *A Dying Colonialism* in 1965. He describes, for example, lesser *colons*, farmers or managers who were so often on the side of the revolutionaries.[29] The em-

25 "Par décision du Ministère de l'Intérieur, les services de police ont procédé, à 13h30 aujourd'hui, à l'enlèvement du mât supportant l'affiche de l'exposition 'Algérie '52,'" (Decree, 5 January 1953).

26 Compare the congratulatory letter sent by the Bone dockers' syndicate to the artists at the Galerie André Weil, 16 January 1953.

27 "Voici le *Portrait de Femmes* de Mireille Miailhe, avec ses yeux d'aveugle vidé par le trachome, comme tant d'autres en Algérie," Etienne Fajon, *L'Humanité*, 30 December 1952, and "*La Consultation opthalmologique dans le bled.* Nous connaissons (et le peuple le connaît encore mieux que nous) toute une phalange de médecins et d'auxiliares médicaux qui ont voué leur existence à la lutte contre le trachome," B. "L'Algérie éclaboussée," *Journal d'Alger*, 1 January 1953.

28 Germaine Tillion, *Algérie en 1957* (Paris: Minuit, 1957), 78. See Nancy Wood, *Germaine Tillion, une femme-mémoire: d'une Algérie à l'autre* (Paris: Autrement, 2003).

29 Franz Fanon, *L'An V de la révolution algérienne* (Paris: Editions Maspero, 1960), 154–55. See also Franz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism* (Harmondsworth, London: Penguin, 1965).

phasis on the family and parent–child relationships in the work of both artists was poignantly undercut by Fanon's analysis of family tensions and disintegration during the war period.[30] And the shantytown/rural emphasis of *Algérie 1952* was as selective as its emphasis on the exploited and oppressed, French, Spanish and *arabo-berbères*: it was far from fully representative of the *nation en formation*.[31]

Fanon's opening chapter, "Algeria Unveiled," offers the richest retrospective critique of *Algérie* 1952. Socialist realism was defined by Taslitzky in 1952 as a two-way revelation: subject matter into art, art into the visual world of the proletariat: "The working class . . . has torn off the veil which separated the world of the arts from its own concerns."[32] The play of revelation and refusal, of sight and blindness was repeated across the range of works exhibited in *Algérie 1952*: the artist "guided by the blind," the depiction of trachoma, the women peering through their veils at militant meetings. Most striking, surely, was the symbolic unveiling in Taslitzky's *Women of Oran* (a long panorama of 2.45 x 0.45 meters; Plate 32.2). He explained:

> striking dockers found themselves in difficulty confronting the police who were savagely attacking them. Alerted, the women came out, went down to the port to help them, and in the midst of violent combat, before an Orient amazed, veils were removed from their customarily hidden faces. . . . It was women's passion, marking an important step toward their liberation, both national and social, a plunge into the future.[33]

The color, the gesticulating women with swirling draperies—above all the central figure with raised arms, aiming a huge curbstone at an armed *gendarme*—recall Delacroix's *Fanatics of Tangiers* (1837). The trope of the wom-

30 Fanon, *L'an V de la révolution*, Chapter 3 on the Algerian family.

31 See Jeanne Modigliani, *Deux peintres et un poète retour d'Algérie: Boris Taslitzky, Mireille Miailhe et Jacques Dubois* (Paris: Cercle d'Art, 1952), 8. Compare the idyllic film footage of Algeria, 1952: http://denisebd.wordpress.com/pied-noir-pionneer/%E2%80%A2-43-images-dalger-textes-et-poesies/film-alger-1952/.

32 "La classe ouvrière . . . a déchiré le voile qui separait le monde des arts de ses propres préoccupations," Taslitzky, "L'Art et les traditions nationales," 72.

33 "Les Dockers en grève, se trouvaient en difficulté face à une police qui les aggressaient sauvagement. Alertées, les femmes sortirent et descendirent sur la porte pour leur porter secours et, au cours d' un combat violent, devant l'Orient stupéfait, les voiles s'écartèrent des visages que la coutume avaient cachés. . . . C'est la passion des femmes, marquant un pas important vers leur libération, à la fois nationale et sociale, fonçant vers l'avenir." Boris Taslitzky, *Algérie 52* (Paris: Editions Cercle d'Art, 1953).

en warrior recalls to Jean Jacques François Lebarbier's *Jeanne Hachette at the Siege of Beauvais in 1472* (1784), a source for Delacroix's *Liberty on the Barricades*, which Taslitzky knew so well.[34]

In Fanon's analysis the veils symbolize a whole tissue of meanings. Prime among them is that of refusal: "This woman who sees without being seen frustrates the colonizer. There is no reciprocity. She does not yield herself, does not give herself, does not offer herself." Rape is the equivalent of the tearing of the veil. And removing the veil (for Taslitzky a "step toward liberation") was also a step toward breaking up Algerian society: Fanon described significant colonial investment in this project. Only after 1955 did the cooption of female terrorists involve a revision of attitudes toward the veil on the Algerian side, and this, precisely, in a context where "Not one of them failed to realize that any Algerian woman arrested would be tortured to death." Unveiled, the militant "Algerian woman . . . in conflict with her own body . . . is a link, sometimes an essential one, in the revolutionary machine." Thus Mireille Miailhe, Parisian artist and militant, disguised in Arab women's clothing, learning the customs of Arab/Berber peoples in Algeria had a dialectical Other: the female Algerian militant and bomber: "that young girl, unveiled only yesterday, who walks with sure steps down the streets of the European city teeming with policemen, parachutists, militiamen."[35]

Critics of both sexes were anxious to differentiate Miailhe's drawing as sensual and "female" in contrast to Taslitzky's "precision and hardness of an act of accusation."[36] Writing on Miailhe for the *Algérie 1952* luxury print album, Taslitzky fluctuates between the exhortations of a professorial elder and the anxiety of a transferred "self-criticism" (using the required communist rhetoric).[37] The differentiated critical response to Miailhe's work veils a dis-

34 See Linda Nochlin, "The Myth of the Woman Warrior," in *Representing Women* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1999), and Jean Vergnet-Ruiz, "Une inspiration de Delacroix? La Jeanne Hachette de Lebarbier," *Revue du Louvre* 2 (1971): 81–85. Taslitzky knew only Delacroix's *La Liberté*.

35 "Cette femme qui voit sans être vue frustre le colonisateur. Il n'y a pas réprocité; elle ne se livre pas, ne se donne pas, ne s'offre pas... L'administration coloniale investit des sommes importantes dans ce combat ... nul n'ignorait le fait que toute Algérienne arrêtée serait torturée jusqu'à la mort. ... l'Algerienne, en conflit avec son corps, est un maillon, essentiel quelquefois de la machine révolutionnaire... Cette jeune fille, hier dévoilée, qui s'avance dans la ville européene sillonnée de policiers, de parachutistes, de miliciens." Fanon, *L'An V de la révolutions algérienne*, 17, 30, 41, 40 (*A Dying Colonialism*, 22, 27, 38, 36).

36 "La précision et dureté d'un acte d'accusation," in Modigliani, *Deux peintres et un poète*.

37 Françoise Thom's *La Langue du bois* (Paris, Julliard, 1987) does not deal with the *langue du bois* as it functions psychoanalytically within the French communist context.

turbing perception of her closeness to her subject, an intimation that she implicitly perceived what Fanon defined as the hidden matriarchy of Algerian society: "Behind the visible, manifest patriarchy, the more significant existence of a basic matriarchy was affirmed."[38] Julia Kristeva has defined "the terror of power and the power of terrorism" as a breaking out of a female, cyclic, monumental time. The sensual orientalist dreamworld implied the female time of tradition and repetition; the military vision, a male time of battle, terror, rape, and torture.[39]

Torture, practiced in France by the Nazis, appropriated as a tool in Algeria, was theorized as a renascent, twentieth-century phenomenon in French civil society before 1950; it is at the core of most analyses of the Algerian war.[40] That this debate should explode over the case of a woman is no surprise: the cause of Djamila Boupacha, the FLN militant accused of placing bombs in Algiers, would involve Simone de Beauvoir, the Tunisian lawyer Gisèle Halimi, Germaine Tillion, and communist glitterati including Picasso. In *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir had declared that to talk of the Other was to set up a Manichaean structure ("Poser l'Autre, c'est definir un manichéisme"). Now, she concluded: "What is exceptional in the Boupacha affair is not the facts, but their unveiling."[41]

Algérie 1952 was premonitory. "For once color, the picturesque and orientalism in painting do not mask the pain of Algeria, and the reasons to fight. For once, painters have set up an unforgiving indictment of the colonial regime," the PCA (Algerian Communist Party) proclaimed in 1953.[42] Yet, color, the picturesque, the very tropes of orientalism are coded in the feminine.

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38 "Derrière le patriarcat visible, manifeste, on affirme l'existence, plus capitale d'un matriarcat de base." Fanon, *L'an V de la révolution*, 16.

39 Julia Kristeva, "Le Temps des femmes," *Cahiers de recherche de sciences des textes et documents* 5 (Winter 1979): 5–19.

40 Alec Mellor's *La torture. Son Histoire, son abolition, sa réapparition au XXième siècle* (Paris: Domat Monchrestien, 1949) gave ample of police abuse and torture of suspects in France from August 1947 to March 1948. Pierre Vidal-Naquet's *La Torture dans la République* (Paris: Minuit, 1972) was displayed in 2009. Kristin Ross's *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonisation and the Reordering of French Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996) is the most striking account in English.

41 "L'exceptionnel, dans l'affaire Boupacha, ce ne sont pas les faits: c'est leur dévoilement." Simone de Beauvoir and Gisèle Halimi, *Djamila Boupacha* (Paris: Gallimard, 1962), 2.

42 "Pour une fois, les couleurs, le pittoresque et l'orientalisme ne masquent pas dans la peinture la douleur de l'Algérie et les raisons de lutter. . . . Pour une fois, des peintres ont dressé un réquisitoire implacable contre la régime colonial." Letter to Boris Taslitzky and Mireille Miailhe, sent by the secretariat of the Algerian Communist Party, *L'Humanité*, 15 January 1953.

Miailhe's involvement with the female bodies and spaces she drew, Taslitzky's transference of the revolutionary ideal to women in *Women of Oran*—with the "unnatural" trope of the woman warrior—anticipated an imminent rupture, a tear of the veil. An anxiety around femininity destabilized the communist rhetoric of militancy. And, inevitably, the artists' structural position could override the signs of solidarity: "Everywhere fear in their eyes and their gestures . . . simply because the stranger who paints them is like those who have hurt them in his clothes and language."[43] As Delacroix himself quickly understood, realism transgressed the Islamic prohibition against graven images.[44]

Thus the regime of representation—whether romantic or "socialist" realism—was the regime of the conqueror: a situation played out in the USSR itself as socialist realism was imposed upon Islamic peoples.[45] It was a regime deployed by the USSR as propaganda in its satellite nations, who were themselves familiar with the French Beaux-Arts tradition; who could read the pictures within the "correct" Manichaean framework—as socialist realism was conceived to be read. *Algérie 1952* was sent to tour Eastern Europe: Miailhe's *Young Agricultural Workers* and Taslitzky's *Père algérien* were donated to the Museum of Fine Arts in Bucharest, on the first stop of the Eastern European tour. She traveled to the official opening there, Taslitzky to Budapest, both to the inauguration in Prague.

France's *mission civilisatrice* was referred to with scorn in the context of *Algérie 1952*: the works showed "all that serves to belie those ready-made phrases about the 'civilizing mission.'"[46] The rights of man enshrined by the French Revolution and its aftermath, the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century intellectual heritage, were part of France's "educational" mission. Yet, as Rita Maran has declared:

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43 "Partout l'effroi dans leurs yeux et dans leurs gestes . . . tout simplement parce que l'inconnu qui les peint ressemble par son costume et son langage aux gens qui leur ont fait mal." Étienne Fajon in *L'Humanité*, 30 December 1952.

44 See André Joubin, ed., *Correspondance générale d'Eugène Delacroix* (Paris: Plon, 1935), vol. 1, 175 and 184 (letters of 8 February and 2 April 1832). "Leurs préjugés sont très grands contre le bel art de la peinture . . . l'habit et la figure de chrétien sont en antipathie à ces gens-ci, au point qu'il faut toujours être escorté de soldats."

45 See Aliya Abakayeva de Tiesenhausen, "Socialist Realist Orientalism? Depictions of Soviet Central Asia, 1934–1954" (PhD diss., University of London, 2010).

46 "Quelques aspects d'une exposition. Algérie 52," corrected page proofs, no source. Taslitzky archives.

> Object of the "civilizing mission," the colonized was never yet a subject with full rights; structurally, the colonized was never fully "man." . . . The colonized could not reach adulthood under colonialism, despite the fact that to make him into "man" was a key legitimating doctrine of colonialism.[47]

The Algerian war, an apotheosis of tripartite tensions, civil, religious, and political, would witness France's violation of its declaration of human rights of 1789, specific articles of the Charter of the United Nations (1945), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations in 1948, and the Geneva Convention of 1949. With *Algérie 1952*, a dying—if paroxysmal—orientalism coincided with France's dying colonialism. The war would shortly explode as we know it, with its violence, its repressed psychoses, its retrospective melancholy, its tragic reenactments.[48]

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47 Rita Maran, *Torture: The Role of Ideology in the French–Algerian War* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1989), 5.

48 Taslitzky's *Women of Oran* was exhibited with works by Mireille Miailhe in *Les Artistes internationaux et la Révolution d'Algérie* for the opening of the Musée National d'Art Moderne et Contemporain, Algiers, in spring 2008. Mireille Miailhe was present. Thanks to the late Mireille Miailhe and Boris Taslitzky, to Evelyne Taslitzky, Florence Miailhe and Isabelle Rollin-Royer, to Anissa Bouyaed for her exhibitions and to Adrien Sina who accompanied me to Vitry and took photographs on 16 September 2009. I would be grateful for help from colleagues in tracing large-scale paintings from *Algérie 1952*.

33

Global Socialist Realism: The Representation of Non-European Cultures in Polish Art of the 1950s

Andrzej Szczerski

The expansion of socialist realism in post-1945 Central and Eastern Europe came as a result of the Yalta division of the Old Continent and the implementation of new cultural policy in the communist states, closely linked to political demands imposed by the Soviet Union. Among the principal factors behind this process was a belief in the universalism of socialist realist ideology, its pictorial form and worldwide application. As the successive art centers in Soviet-occupied Europe converted to the new artistic faith, socialist realism seemed to have acquired a status of new, global, painterly style, relevant and understood regardless of geography, local cultures, and historic traditions. Among the particular genres used to strengthen the message were the representations of non-European cultures and nations, engaged in the independence wars against colonial powers or proverbial American imperialism.

The new genres did not occupy the most prominent place in Polish art of the 1950s, but their presence accompanied by anticolonial discourse was clearly visible.[1] Above all, in order to find relevance among Poles, the new

1 E.g. "Third World" wars of independence were listed among the major topics for artists in the catalog of Third National Exhibition of Art (OWP) in Warsaw 1952–53, flagship enterprise organized in the Zachęta

discourse had to be "nationalized." In the immediate postwar years, the communist regime often referred to nationalist rhetoric as a source of its legitimization; hence, it did not come as a surprise that the struggles of Third World subjects were identified with the recent Polish fight against Nazi Germany. At the same time, the colonial wars were compared with the fight against the political elites of the pre-1939 Second Republic of Poland. The rhetoric used to describe the fight of black Africans in Kenya against the "Anglo-Saxon colonists" did not differ much from the descriptions of the post-1945 emancipation of Polish peasants and workers from their dependence on a despised Polish landowner or capitalist.[2] In a larger perspective, the colonial fight for independence could also refer to Polish nineteenth-century uprisings against the partitioning powers and hence make the colonial subject appear as the reincarnation of the Polish insurgent.

Returning to the roots of national cultures as the source of the art revival—seen as a symbol of political and cultural liberation after the colonial era—became a cliché regularly employed in the discussion of "Third World" countries. Not surprisingly, it coincided with contemporary discussion within Poland about how to produce a socialist realist work of art that could be "national in form and socialist in content" and hence acceptable for local cultural tradition. At the same time, the preservation of national peculiarities sustained the Soviet imperial myth of internationalism, based on a brotherhood of independent nations joined in their struggle for a shared communist future, in stark contrast to American-inspired cosmopolitanism, presented as subjugation to US political influence and cultural values. Such rhetoric accompanied series of exhibitions of non-European art organized through the 1950s in major Polish cities, predominantly in the capital city of Warsaw. In most cases, these exhibitions were carefully controlled, large-scale enterprises, organized by state agendas, and often sent directly from Moscow rather than from the artists' countries of origin. To name a few, in January 1950 Mexican prints were shown at the Warsaw

Gallery in Warsaw by the state and official artists' union in order to promote socialist realism. See Stanisław Teisseyre, untitled introduction, catalog of the *Third National Exhibition of Art* (Warszawa, 1952), 12.

2 See, e.g., the description of the alleged atrocities of Vietnamese landowners against their own people, which a native Vietnamese describes to his Polish friends as reality, which for them might appear to be "a bygone epoch known only from history books." Wojciech Żukrowski, *Dom bez ścian* (Warszawa: 1954), 8–13.

National Museum and welcomed as the carriers of national spirit and ideas of political liberation; in May 1951 the same museum presented historic and contemporary Chinese art, which thanks to Mao became the weapon in the struggle for communism, showing a predilection toward realism and hence supporting the belief in socialist realism as the style of the progressive world.[3] The exhibition of Chinese applied art at the Zachęta National Gallery in Warsaw in October 1955 was praised for including products based on traditional Chinese patterns and criticized for showing objects inspired by European tradition.[4] The same discourse applied to the debates concerning architecture, including an extensive article by Mexican architectural critic Ignacio Marquez Rodiles, written especially for the influential journal *Architektura*, who emphasized the correlation between the process of liberation from colonial dependence, which started in 1821, and the emergence of national form in Mexican art and architecture. According to Rodiles, contemporary architecture, dominated by old colonial styles and functionalism "alien to the interest of Mexican people," still lagged behind well-known mural paintings produced since the 1920s, composed of progressive content and national form. Yet the architecture was on its way to a desired synthesis of visual arts, sculpture, and architecture, which could educate people and express their national independence.[5]

The foreign exhibitions could also be a pretext for debates concerning the Polish art scene, as if the newly discovered Third World art centers could provide the long-awaited answers needed at home. The process illustrated the paradoxical orientalization of non-European cultures, which suddenly became the "authentic" and "noble savages," ready to give lessons to countries much more advanced in communism-building.[6] The paradox lay precisely in the discrepancy between the apparent respect for the younger brothers and sisters and their actual framing in the requirements of current

3 Ignacy Witz, "Grafika meksykańska w Muzeum Narodowym," *Przegląd Artystyczny* 1–2 (1950): 38–41, and editorial, "Stara i nowa sztuka chińska," *Przegląd Artystyczny* 4 (1951): 65–70.

4 Editorial, "Wystawa rzemiosła artystycznego Chińskiej Republiki Ludowej w Zachęcie," *Architektura* 1 (1955): 28.

5 Ignacio Marquez Rodiles, "Problemy współczesnej architektury meksykańskiej," *Architektura* 7 (1955): 210–13.

6 On the paradoxes of Saidian orientalization discourse in Central Europe, see Andrzej Szczerski, "Colonial/Post-Colonial Central Europe—History vs. Geography," in *Anxiety of Influence: Bachelors, Brides and Family Romance*, ed. Adam Budak (Bern: Stadtgalerie, 2004), 64–72.

politics. As an example, one may note the reception of the exhibition of historic and contemporary Indian art, which in October 1953 went to Warsaw and Krakow, after the great success it had enjoyed in Moscow. The popular press emphasized the greatness of the show and the preeminence of the national traditions in contemporary works, not to mention the political rationale behind the show, which strengthened the political and economic ties between Poland and India. In turn, the principal art journal *Przegląd Artystyczny* (The arts review), controlled by the official artists' union ZPAP (Związek Polskich Artystów Plastyków), published an extensive review by Jerzy Zanoziński, who tried to reject the accusations of formalism against contemporary Indian art explaining that, in India, form was not an end in itself but served "to express profound meanings."[7] Zanoziński carefully balanced his words to justify several deformations in Indian works in order not to question its progressive character and distinguish it sharply from decadent bourgeois formalism.

Such interpretation of Indian or any other non-European art clearly exemplified the attitude of communist art critics toward "authentic" other cultures. Their otherness needed to be domesticated through adaptation to the master narrative produced by the Soviet type of socialist realism, if not the form then the content. Even the not strictly socialist realist Indian artist Palsikara, active in the 1940s, represented in Zanoziński words the "dramatic expression of the will of Indian people to break free from colonial oppression."[8] The same argument had also been employed in architectural criticism, e.g., when in September 1954 the principal journal *Architektura* commented on the visit of an international group of architects to Warsaw. Foreign guests praised the preservation of folk national features in Polish contemporary architecture, as summarized by critic Arnold Majorek:

> The role of the indigenous, folkloristic trend in our culture being developed so well in a People's Democracy was particularly cherished by the representatives of the nations liberated in the aftermath of World War II from the various forms of colonial and semicolonial dependence, who are

7 Jerzy Zanoziński, "Wystawa sztuki hinduskiej," *Przegląd Artystyczny* 6 (1953): 28–40.
8 Ibid., 39.

building their own, independent statehoods based on their national cultural values.[9]

The most authoritative voice in support of the importance of national cultures within the internationalist Communist Bloc was that of the influential art historian and art critic, director of the Institute of Art at the Polish Academy of Science, Juliusz Starzyński. He expressed his credo, when writing about the 1954 Venice Biennale for *Przegląd Artystyczny*. According to Starzyński, Polish socialist realist painting was just part of a larger international struggle for new culture and new realist painting, whose protagonists were to be found among progressive nations in Europe but also in Asia, America, and Africa. The new socialist realist painting style preserved uniqueness of national form in contrast to cosmopolitanism, directed against national tradition, exposing it to influences of foreign, usually hostile ideology.[10]

The internationalist/nationalist agenda largely influenced the representation of non-European cultures as well, enforcing artists to negotiate between exoticism of content and identifiable national form. Such tensions had been particularly poignant during the Korean War, one of the most popular "colonial" subjects in socialist realist painting of the early 1950s. Apart from the regular letters of protest against American atrocities and words of support for Korean brothers and sisters published in art journals, e.g., in the name of artists' union ZPAP, soon a large number of works dedicated to the Korean War entered official exhibitions and publications. The most famous and emblematic for the decade was a painting by Wojciech Fangor known as *Korean Mother* (*Matka Koreanka*), which was awarded a second prize at the official Second National Exhibition of Art in Warsaw in 1951.[11] Fangor's painting was largely based on the visual tradition of nineteenth-century realist painting with political overtones, based on clear, almost caricature-like visual codes. At the same time, it could also evoke references to Polish painting and drawing of the 1860s, showing the tragedy of the January Uprising

9 Arnold Majorek, "Międzynarodowe spotkanie architektów," *Architektura* 9 (1954): 228–30. The international group of architects included delegates from Korea, India, and China, among other countries.

10 Juliusz Starzyński, "Internacjonalizm czy kosmopolityzm? (kilka uwag z powodu XXVII Biennale w Wenecji)," *Przegląd Artystyczny* 5–6 (1954): 16–18.

11 See the catalog of *II Ogólnopolska Wystawa Plastyki* (Warsaw: CBWA Zachęta, 1951).

of 1863–64 against Russia, in particular to popular works by Artur Grottger, such as his cycle *War* (1866–67). The obviousness of the foreground figures—innocent war victims—where the fallen mother's gesture resembled crucifixion, and the child stood for helpless abandonment in the face of death, exemplified the fundamental feature of socialist realist image that Wojciech Włodarczyk called its "paralysis." As the ideological meaning of the works needed to be undisputable, artists had to refrain from any visual experiments and ambiguities, which could lead them into the abyss of formalism.[12] But Fangor decided to strengthen the appeal of his work, referring to a traditional concept in Polish irredentist iconography, that of the "Polish Mother," not only the symbol of motherhood, but also a tacit hero in the nineteenth-century fight for Polish independence. The "Polish Mother," although rarely seen in the battlefield, acted as the crucial participant in the military uprisings, providing shelter for insurgents, but also being capable of sacrificing her life for the benefit of her children.[13] Fangor conspicuously incorporated the Korean War into the national visual tradition, and it was only thanks to the facial features of both victims that the image was identified with contemporary war in the distant Far East. At the same Second National Exhibition of Art, the Korean War was largely seen through the heroic deeds of women, as in Jan Kober's drawing *Korea* with a dignified lonely mother and two crying children, and Konstanty Lech's plaster cast of a sculpture of a Chinese woman warrior entitled *In Defense of Korean Sisters*.[14]

For Polish artists, the Korean War provided an opportunity to portray communist revolutions beyond Europe and test the visual requirements of socialist realism. This did not occur in painting and sculpture only; Korean War posters and cartoons, designed by leading artists such as Jan Lenica, Tomasz Gleb, or Wojciech Fangor, enjoyed large circulation and were universally praised for the clarity of their message, based on realist tradition and contemporary political caricatures. Another genre of Korean paintings dealt with the support and care offered to Korean émigrés who found temporary shelter in Poland. Stanisław Wójcik, in his widely praised work *Korean Chil-*

12 Wojciech Włodarczyk, *Socrealizm: sztuka polska w latach 1950–54* (Kraków, 1991).

13 Agnieszka Zawadowska, Maria Janion, Monika Grodzka, and Katarzyna Czeczot, *Polka. Medium, cień, wyobrażenie* (Warszaw, 2005).

14 See *II Ogólnopolska Wystawa Plastyki*.

dren in Kindergarten (1954), showed the youngest generation of Korean people indulging in an idyllic scene of play in a Polish nursery. Wójcik's painting not only proved that Poland helped Korean children to overcome war traumas, but also suggested that they learned on the banks of Vistula River how to rebuild their own country and create a prosperous, communist future. Their favorite game in kindergarten, rendered carefully by Wójcik, involved building blocks and their own architectural constructions.[15]

This romanticized portrayal of the Korean War and the sentimental care offered to its survivors in Poland were not intended to give justice to the Korean nation or to voice any genuine protest against the war crimes, but rather to influence the Polish public. In this context, communist Poland looked like a prosperous place of refuge for survivors of imperialist tyrannies; thanks to the brotherhood with the Soviet Union, Poland avoided imperialist war with US allies in Europe and peacefully began to build a happy future. Given the unstable internal situation in the 1950s associated with the Stalinist terror, military resistance, and postwar shortages in the economy, this could not be further from the truth. Yet this discrepancy was not only covered up by propaganda; non-European affairs were in fact used to redirect attention from local conflicts to distant wars of global importance. Most importantly, the success of communist power in Korea acted as the ultimate proof of the unstoppable progress of communism around the world and the futility of any resistance at home.

The use of non-European subjects as propaganda tools aimed at the public in Poland can be exemplified by a series of study tours organized by the state agencies for chosen artists, who traveled to "Third World" countries in order to report on the progress of their fight against colonial powers and achievements in communism-building. Such visits, usually given larger-than-life status, were publicized in the media and recognized by official art institutions, which presented their artistic effects in exhibitions and publications. Three such visits deserve attention, as they centered on the same ideologically sensitive territory, i.e., China and Vietnam, and their outcome might be ranked among the most valuable artistic achievements of Polish art in the 1950s.

15 This somehow paternalist attitude toward new members of the Communist Bloc could occasionally include China, as testified by a painting of Ludwik Maciąg, *Chinese Zoo Technicians in a State Horse-Breeding Farm in Kwidzyń* (1954), showing Polish horse-breeders teaching Chinese colleagues the skills of their profession.

The first artist who traveled to China on an official state visit in 1952 was Tadeusz Kulisiewicz, a well-established graphic artist, praised by contemporary art criticism for his "critical realism" and interest in life in provincial Poland. In China, Kulisiewicz was given a similar task, i.e., to portray inhabitants and the everyday life of provinces in the country newly "liberated" by Mao. The ideological rationale behind the project was well captured by a contemporary critic, who explained Kulisiewicz's empathy for China with the observation that he came "from a country working to realize the same ideas."[16] Through Kulisiewicz's eyes, Poland and China were to appear as members of the same global order, struggling to achieve the same goals. Kulisiewicz's Chinese drawings were exhibited in Warsaw in 1953 together with his illustrations for two books on "New China" published in the same year: the Polish translation of Pablo Neruda's poem *China* and Adam Ważyk's *Widziałem Krainę Środka* (I saw the Land of the Middle Empire). According to a contemporary critic,

> the titles of the Chinese drawings speak for themselves. In addition to *Lake in the Gardens of the Summer Palace*, *Rice Fields in the Rain* and *Boats on the River*, there are *Hero of Work*, *Farmer Gen Chou-So*, *Banners before Tien-An-Men* and *Demonstrators at the Funeral of the Heroine Liu Hou-Wang*. Kulisiewicz is no longer satisfied with landscape drawings; he is gripped by the new pattern of life brought into being by the revolution.[17]

Kulisiewicz pioneered not only the transcontinental art journeys, but also, and above all, a new visual language used to represent non-European subjects, largely influencing his followers. This new language transgressed the standard limits of socialist realism and showed a predilection toward simplified linear drawings combined with the boldness of almost expressionist black-and-white sketches, particularly of the countryside. When shown in the Polish pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 1954, the drawings were awarded one

16 Joanna Guze, *Kulisiewicz* (Warsaw, 1956), 20. Guze also emphasized that a year earlier Kulisiewicz had executed works such as *The Korean Soldiers*, revealing "his attitude to what he has recognized in his own conscience as Freedom and Democracy."

17 Ibid.

of four UNESCO prizes, which covered the costs of their reproduction and dissemination around the world, a fact praised in the Polish press.[18]

In October 1953, Aleksander Kobzdej traveled to China and Vietnam as the deputy chairman of the Polish cultural delegation, accompanied by communist officials and other artists.[19] The delegation was to report on the progress of the Chinese Cultural Revolution under Mao and the heroic fight of the Vietnamese people against the French and their allies. During his journey, which ended in February 1954 in Vietnam and coincided with the crucial Battle of Dien Bien Phu, Kobzdej produced a vast body of works, mainly sketches with ink on paper reporting on the places, landscapes, and people he encountered. In stark contrast to standard socialist realist works produced at home, such as his famous *Pass Me a Brick* (1949), Kobzdej allowed himself to focus on the everyday scenes, which, although nonheroic and painted with almost existentialist indifference, gave a spectator a very moving insight into the realities of life in the Far East. Diverse sights associated with the basic life of Chinese and Vietnamese peasants were supplemented with images of warriors carrying weapons, both men and women shown without glorification, but with an obvious sense of commitment to their fight. Kobzdej also presented victims of imperialist policies waiting for the expected arrival of a better future and portraits of "new people" as produced by the new political realities, such as a soldier, the "foreman of the fight." Apparently, the objective eye of an artist could not only document Far East realities but also pursue ideological aims, indeed more eloquently than standard propaganda posters and paintings. Kobzdej carefully avoided straightforward representations of war atrocities, even when showing infamous Vietnamese POW camps or victims of the Cultural Revolution in China, and thus helped to embellish and domesticate what is today known as the bloodiest conflict and social engineering process in the post-WWII world. At the same time, following Kulisiewicz's pattern, he introduced a radically new visual language into the socialist realist sphere, moving away from ossified pictorial dogmas and introducing

18 "Z zagranicy: sztuka polska na XXVII Biennale w Wenecji," *Przegląd Artystyczny* 4 (1954): 91. It was not the only artistic journey of Kulisiewicz to Third World countries; in 1956 he went to India and in 1957 and 1959 to Mexico. See Tadeusz Kulisiewicz, *Rysunki z Indii* (Warszaw, 1959); Tadeusz Kulisiewicz, *India and Mexico Drawings* (Warszaw, 1961).

19 For a detailed account of Kobzdej's journey, see Dominik Kuryłek, "Rysunki z Wietnamu Aleksandra Kobzdeja," *Panoptikum* 7 (2008): 191–204.

a sense of emotional and human attachment to the represented subjects. The sketchy manner, refined juxtaposition of light and dark shades providing a sense of intimacy, and the focus on individual figures rather than bombastic group scenes evoked a sense of true sympathy toward the painterly subjects. Instead of false grandeur, Kobzdej provided spectators with the renewed definition of realism, which although committed politically and socially to propaganda aims, preserved genuine interest in the contemporary world and its human actors.

Kobzdej performed his duties well and received wide acclaim. In early 1954, his drawings were shown in Moscow and a selection of them was published in the widely read Soviet journal *Ogoniok*. Subsequently, 160 of them were shown in Warsaw, and following the exhibition Kobzdej received a high state distinction, the Order of the Rebirth of Poland.[20] The drawings were given large coverage in the journal *Przegląd Artystyczny*, written by Juliusz Starzyński. Later the same year, thanks to Starzyński, the drawings constituted a major part of the exhibition in the Polish pavilion at the Venice Biennale. In Poland, the Ministry of National Defense published a diary of the Vietnam journey by journalist and writer Wojciech Żukrowski, who accompanied Kobzdej—the diary was illustrated with a selection of Kobzdej drawings.[21]

Last but not least, Andrzej Strumiłło's journeys to China in 1954, India in 1959, and Vietnam in 1969 need to be mentioned.[22] His Chinese journey could be particularly instructive, as it closely followed the pattern of Kobzdej's expedition of the previous year. During his six-week stay in China in autumn 1954, Strumiłło produced around two hundred sketches and drawings, focusing on Chinese people and countryside.[23] Upon his return, these "Chinese works" were shown in the principal Warsaw gallery run by the of-

20 It was not the only order Kobzdej received for his work. In 1958 he was granted the Vietnamese Order of Work 1st Class. See Joanna Wasilewska-Dobkowska, "Aleksander Kobzdej w Wietnamie," www.arteria.art.pl/5smakow/k_wystawa_szkice.php?lang=pl, note published on the occasion of the exhibition of Kobzdej drawings in the Muranów Cinema in Warsaw, 2007.

21 Wojciech Żukrowski, *Dom bez ścian* (Warsawa: Wydawnictwo Ministerstwa Obrony Narodowej, 1954). The book was published by Wydawnictwo Ministerstwa Obrony Narodowej, the official publisher of the Polish Ministry of Defense. As noted by Żukrowski, in Vietnam he and Kobzdej were accompanied by a Czech soldier from the security forces known as "Obrana Lidu." Żukrowski wrote other novels dedicated to his Vietnam expedition, e.g., *Ognisko w dżungli. Opowieści i baśnie z Wietnamu*, with folk tales and stories from prewar Vietnam, illustrated by Katarzyna Latałło.

22 Andrzej Strumiłło, *Ryżowe ziarna gniewu* (Warszaw, 1972).

23 *Rysunki z Chin Ludowych Andrzeja Strumiłło* (Warszaw: CBWA, 1955).

ficial artists' association (ZPAP) and the catalog essay was written by another member of the Polish delegation who accompanied Strumiłło in China, the well-known philologist Jan Kott. In Kott's words, they both saw a friendly country of hard-working people who can change nature and build modern industries, and a society symbolized by a young girl in An-Szań, a new metallurgic factory, who sitting at the white desk moves great cranes and controls the flow of liquid steel with a single touch of her finger.[24] Significantly, Strumiłło's works were similar to those of Kobzdej in terms of stylistics, due to their relative simplicity in drawing techniques, the sketchy manner of their execution and their focus on iconography composed of genre scenes, curiosities, and portraits, all of them representing a "noble and simple life" in the new world.

In all three cases of Kulisiewicz, Kobzdej, and Strumiłło, the non-European subject seemed to offer more flexibility and room for experimentation to a degree unthinkable in the official painting related to Polish realities. Hence, its otherness provided a necessary umbrella for the less limited freedom of artistic expression. The new visual language first introduced by Kulisiewicz and developed by Kobzdej won general recognition, as if it provided the long-awaited answer to how to produce a moderate version of socialist realism, much more convincing than standard production seen in Polish galleries in the early 1950s. This shift occurred in the significant moment, when after Stalin's death official cultural policy was undergoing slow but decisive changes. Significantly, Kobzdej's and Kulisiewicz's Chinese and Vietnamese drawings were shown together at the 1954 Venice Biennale and simultaneously praised in the professional press by influential art critics; Mieczysław Porębski's text on Kulisiewicz and Juliusz Starzyński's text on Kobzdej were published in the same second issue of *Przegląd Artystyczny* in 1954.[25]

The crowning achievement of the global ambitions of the Polish communist authorities in the 1950s was the Fifth World Festival of Youth and Stu-

24 Kott also noticed in China a Buddhist temple changed into a school, serving the communal tea plantation, which for him was clearly a symbol of communist modernization and the vanishing power of traditional religions, much desired also in Poland.

25 Kuryłek, "Rysunki z Wietnamu Aleksandra Kobzdeja," 195. See also Aleksander Wojciechowski, *Młode malarstwo polskie 1944–1974* (Wrocław Warszawa Kraków Gdańsk Łódź: 1983), 51–53. Oriental drawings of Kulisiewicz, Kobzdej, and Strumiłło ultimately entered the same collection of the Museum of Asia and Pacific in Warsaw.

dents in Warsaw, organized by the World Federation of Democratic Youth and the International Students Union, accompanied by the official youth organization of the Polish Communist Party in August 1955. Several hundred young people united in various unions of appropriate political affiliations around the globe were invited to visit the Polish capital and demonstrate their support for peace and cooperation between "the forces of progress" around the world. In Polish art history, the Warsaw festival is remembered for the large-scale decorations in public spaces, designed by Wojciech Fangor, Henryk Tomaszewski, Maria and Kazimierz Piechotka, and other artists from the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts. For the first time since 1949, socialist realist visual propaganda was replaced with abstract and surreal decorative motives, forecasting the aesthetic language of the post-1956 Thaw period. As part of the Warsaw festival, a groundbreaking exhibition of contemporary art *Against War, against Fascism* (also known also as *Arsenal*) was organized, being no longer dominated by socialist realism but a variety of "realisms" and individual interpretations of expressionism.[26] Nonetheless, the internationalist agenda of the festival resembled the paradigms of the early 1950s and was aimed at convincing Varsovians and the rest of Polish society that they inhabited a country that was open to the world and enjoyed the benefits of belonging to the communist family.[27] The streets of Warsaw became an open-air gallery exhibiting various foreign ornaments, slogans, and images.[28] Streets and squares were also a meeting point for guests and local residents, as the press reported about the enthusiastic greetings offered by Varsovians to foreign visitors. From today's perspective, even taking into consideration the official newspeak of propaganda, the popular interest in the event was surprising. Yet it showed the hunger for international contacts, which in the 1950s were radically limited, rather than support for another communist ritual, paradoxically showing not the openness but the degree to which the country was sealed off from the rest of the world. In 1955, foreign guests enjoyed celebrity status in Warsaw and were often asked to give autographs, while their photos were published in the popular press with anon-

26 Janusz Bogucki, *Sztuka Polski Ludowej* (Warszawa, 1983), 98–103.

27 In a similar way, the very scarce visits of foreign architects in the 1950s and their appraisal of contemporary Polish architecture were shown as the ultimate proof of the achievements of communist Poland, see "Odgłosy międzynarodowej wycieczki architektów," *Architektura* 5 (1953): 133–40, with opinions of architects, e.g., from Great Britain, Western Germany, the Soviet Union, and Iran.

28 Hanna Onoszko, "Dekoracje festiwalowe," *Przegląd Artystyczny* 3–4 (1955): 68–79.

ymous captions, such as "The representative of African youth says: Warsaw is a city of happy people."[29] It can be noted that apart from the major *Arsenal* show, the festival program also included an exhibition of young artists from participating countries organized in the Zachęta Gallery, among widely publicized works also featuring a socialist realist sculpture from Czechoslovakia representing "a victim of colonialism."[30]

If socialist realism hoped to have a global range and become the ultimate painterly style of the new communist world, the process of its dissemination showed the rationale behind the globalization narrative as produced in the Soviet Union after 1945. In reference to Zygmunt Baumann, this type of globalization can be understood as glocalization, which, according to David Clarke and Marcus Doel,

> implies a worldwide restratification of society based on freedom of movement (or lack thereof). "Glocalization" polarizes mobility, or polarizes society in terms of differential mobility "some inhabit the globe, others are chained to a place." "Glocalization" means globalization for some; localization for others. The ability to use time to overcome the limitations of space is the prerogative of the globals. The locals remained tied to a place—where, for many, time is increasingly abundant and redundant.[31]

> For David Clarke and Marcus Doel Bauman shows that a localized existence was hardly a problem when this was the norm, and the means of giving meaning to that existence had been within reach. Being merely local in a glocalized world, however, is automatically rendered a secondary existence, since the means for giving meaning to existence have been placed out of reach. It is tantamount to confinement without the need for prison walls. The polarization of freedom of movement thus serves to redefine all other freedoms, adding a new dimension to deprivation.[32]

29 See, e.g., "Spotkanie z uczestnikami festiwalu," *Stolica* 399:33, 14 August 1955.

30 "Międzynarodowa wystawa sztuki młodych w Zachęcie," *Stolica* 397:31, 31 August 1955.

31 David Clarke and Marcus Doel, "Zygmunt Bauman," in *Key Thinkers on Space and Place*, ed. Rob Kitchin, Gill Valentine, and Phil Hubbard (London: Sage, 2004).

32 Ibid. See also Paul Beilharz, ed. *The Bauman Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001).

The representation of non-European cultures showed precisely the paradox of glocal exclusion. The postcolonial nations were granted the status of a localized version of the communist global master narrative and hence the secondary status within the global context. The newly liberated Third World subjects were on the verge of becoming part of the communist empire, yet had to be framed in their national perspective in order to make sure they were chained to the place of their origin, showing the "Chinese" or "Vietnamese" path to a glorious future. By definition, they could not compete with the global Soviet narrative, which was beyond their reach. But the glocal impact of the "Third World" path to communism could have been felt in Poland, too. The implied superiority of the already liberated new Poland vis-à-vis newly emerging communist states, represented in the rendering of the Korean War or the Vietnam War, in fact only masked the very act of localization of Poland. Like any other Soviet satellite state, communist Poland had been framed into the boundaries set by the authorities in Moscow, which controlled the impact and reach of its global narrative, both in temporal and spatial terms. The interest in anticolonial wars in the Third World served precisely the purpose of localizing cultures that were destined to repeat the dogmas elaborated by the self-proclaimed center of the new global communist world. The figure of a Kenyan citizen about to throw away the colonial chains, as in the sculpture by Adam Smolana (1955) seen in the gallery of a Polish museum in the 1950s, did not stand for any degree of freedom achieved in Poland and nor did it show the opposite, the overwhelming censorship and the subjugation of society to the totalitarian rule and its hierarchies.[33] At the same time, ironically, it showed that Poland did not join the progressive forces aimed at liberating mankind, and that it acquired the status of a colony within the global Soviet empire, like many other countries in Central and Eastern Europe.[34]

33 Reproduced in *Przegląd Artystyczny* 3–4 (1955).

34 A version of this article was first published in *Mythology of the Soviet Land*, the catalog of the exhibition at the Latvian National Museum of Art in Riga, edited by Elita Ansone (Riga: Latvian National Museum of Art, 2009).

34

The Influence of Käthe Kollwitz on Chinese Creation: Between Expressionism and Revolutionary Realism

Estelle Bories

The writer and essayist Lu Xun made a lasting mark on what Tang Xiaobing calls "the origins of the Chinese avant-garde."[1] Lu Xun (1881–1936) was able to formalize the aesthetic criteria and judgments that would connect one part of Chinese art to social activism.[2] On a formal level, the much darker vision to which he wanted to give impetus brought about in him a determined interest in engraving.[3] In Lu Xun's career and writing on art, the German artist Käthe Kollwitz occupied an absolutely crucial

1 X. B. Tang, *Origins of the Avant-Garde: The Modern Wood Cut Movement* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000).

2 Lu Xun, *Errances (Panghuang)—suivi de "Les chemins divergents de la littérature et du pouvoir politique"* (Paris: Éditions Rue d'Ulm, 2004). See also François Julien, *Lu Xun. Ecriture et Révolution* (Paris: Presse de l'École normale supérieure, 1979); Simon Leys, *Essais sur la Chine* (Robert Laffon: Paris, 1998).

3 Increasing numbers of studies are being carried out and exhibitions held on the development of wood engraving in China: F. Dal Lago, "Les racines populaires de la propagande communiste en Chine: des gravures sur bois du Mouvement pour la nouvelle xylographie aux nouvelles estampes du Nouvel An," *Arts Asiatiques* 66 (2001); *Woodcuts in Modern China, 1937–2008: Towards a Universal Pictorial Language (2 December 2008–26 April 2009)* (Picker Art Gallery–Colgate University, 2009); A. M. Zhou, "Red Classics: Yan'an Woodcuts during the War of Resistance," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 7:3 (2006): 492–503; D. Holms, *Art and Ideology in Revolutionary China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); T. H. Chang, "Two Images of Socialism: Woodcuts in Chinese Communist Politics," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 39:1 (1997): 34–60.

position.[4] Lu Xun literally imposed Kollwitz onto the history of Chinese modernity. Following the death of Lu Xun in 1936, Kollwitz remained a key point of reference. After the creation of the People's Republic of China in 1949—which ushered in a radical transformation of artistic teaching and the issues attributed to art—the work of Käthe Kollwitz continued to be cited as an example.

We will analyze firstly the international scope of Lu Xun's actions and the way in which his interest in the work of Käthe Kollwitz conveyed the compassionate symbolism it provided. We will then study the way in which the development of knowledge about Soviet realism (*sulianzhuyi xianshizhuyi*), from 1934 onward, ushered in a period of reflection on revolutionary art that was able to move beyond the feeling that Chinese creativity was in a stalemate (an avant-garde that was not adapted to the tastes of the proletariat and literature criticized for its lack of connection with reality). We will then focus on the 1950s, a period that marked the peak of artistic exchanges between China and the Soviet Union. We will see that in the various sequences of the evolution of Chinese art, Käthe Kollwitz inspired the adherence and the acclaim of the entire artistic community; her art was modeled on the various fashionable discourses, glorifying her dexterity of technique or the inclusion of the class struggle in her creations.

Knowledge of the German artist Käthe Kollwitz in China owes a great deal to the writer and essayist Lu Xun.[5] His internationalist vision inspired him to spread in his country the works of engravers from Germany (Käthe

4 W. Zhang, *Lu Xun lun meishu* (Beijing: Renmin meishu chu banshee, 1982).

5 Lu Xun, originally from Zhejiang, came from a family of teachers affiliated to the Qing dynasty who suffered from disgrace at the end of their reign. Despite studying medicine during his stay in Japan in 1902, he ended up moving toward literature. On his return from Japan he took up various posts in education (era of the renewal of the institutions by Cai Yunpei) and became involved in the movement of 4 May 1911. He arrived in Shanghai in 1927 and helped to create the League of Left-Wing Writers (Zhongguo zuoyi zuojia lianmeng). The publication in 1918 his first story "Diary of a Madman" (inspired by the work by Gogol of the same name) was an immediate success and made him a major literary figure. Alongside his activities as a translator, teacher, writer, and essayist, he also edited reviews. One of the episodes that marked a break between Lu Xun and the Chinese Communist Party occurred at the end of his life. Following the Japanese invasion, the Chinese Communist Party wanted to establish a united front in accordance with the directives of the Komintern. Under the leadership of Wang Ming and Zhou Yang, who were in charge of the cultural sector, the party officials wanted a united front from the perspective of developing a literature for national defense. Lu Xun and his comrades from the League of Left-Wing Writers—one of whom was Hu Feng—opposed a decision that would lead to ideological uniformity. Following various ploys orchestrated by Zhou Yang—and strongly criticized by Lu Xun—the League of Left-Wing Writers was dissolved. Some of Lu Xun's disciples were subjected to repression.

Kollwitz, Carl Meffert, etc.), Belgium (Frans Masereel), the United States (William Siegel), Russia (Aleksandr Serafimovich), or Japan (Uchiyama Kakechi).[6] In a manner different to Liu Haisu or Xu Beihong, Lu Xun endeavored to define a popular art form (*dazhong yishu*) that was in a position to affect the urban proletariat.[7]

Indeed, some of the wood engraving produced in Shanghai in the early 1930s did broach themes such as the world of work (Jiang Feng), protest against the Japanese invasion and bombings of 1937 (Hu Yichuan and Liu Xian), and the crushing burden of agricultural work (Chen Baozhen). The subjects chosen, in phase with the contextual information, found particular resonance in the work of Kollwitz. Two formal aspects in particular caught the attention of the most dedicated artists: the portrayal of the fighting crowd and the focus on expressions of pain.[8]

Engravings from this series (*Ein Weberaufstand* [Weaver's revolt]) were presented at an exhibition of German graphic works in June 1932. The Kollwitz series on the peasant revolts then became essential references.[9] An engraved portrait of Lu Xun by Li Yitai, dated 1974 and showing Kollwitz's *Schwarze Anna* in the background, proves how integral a part Kollwitz's works were of the artistic environment at the time. Again, the portrayal of an oppressed crowd forming one single body—galvanized by a feminine presence appearing to orchestrate and accompany the advance through a wave movement—caught the imagination of the advocates of engraving in China.

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6 Besides engravers, knowledge of the paintings of Constantin Meunier (1831–1905) is testimony to his interest in militant artistic figures. See Mengtian Huang, *Lu Xun yu meisha* (Daguang chubanshe, 1972). Being the cosmopolitan spirit he was, Lu Xun also collected Japanese engravings, in particular creative engraving (*sosahu hanga).* And he did not abandon wood engravings exhibited for the New Year symbolizing prosperity and luck (*nianhua)*, still established in the Chinese countryside. From 1933, Lu Xun was interested in Soviet engravings. He organized exhibitions in empty apartments. On this point, see Tang, *Origins of the Avant-Garde.*

7 J. F. Andrew and K. Y. Shen, ed., *A Century in Crisis: Modernity and Tradition in the Art of Twentieth Century China* (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1998); S. Weg, *Fictions du pouvoir chinois. Litterature, modernisme et démocratie au début du 20ème siècle* (Paris: École des hautes études en sciences sociales, 2009).

8 These engravers had been involved in organizing various associations and movements aimed at sharing knowledge and information about wood engraving. The review *Modern Age* and the Spring Field Painting Society were major distribution bodies. Li Hua endeavored in particular to develop the movement at national level. One of his works is emblematic of this period of struggle: *Roar China!: Lu Xun, Masereel et l'avant-garde graphique en Chine, 1919–1949* (Ghent: Museum voor Schone Kunsten, 2009).

9 *Lu Qun quanji*, vol. 8 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1981).

What Lu Xun and Käthe Kollwitz had in common was that they never joined the Communist Party. They were nonetheless both linked to its history. The people around Lu Xun were particularly affected by the repression coming down on young partisans of the left.[10] The darkness of this period of purges, followed by the Japanese invasion, led him to take a particular interest in the wood engravings of Käthe Kollwitz. This was because he saw the circulation of her work as a way to universalize the figure of the sacrificial martyr. In September 1931, at the end of the meeting of a group of young left-wing activists, five of them—including the writer Rou Shi—were arrested and summarily executed. To pay tribute to their deaths, Lu Xun printed *Das Opfer* (The sacrifice) by Kollwitz in the review *Beidao* (The big bear), run by Ding Li. Taken from the series *Krieg* (War), Lu Xun chose this harrowing image showing the separation of a mother from her child to symbolize the deaths of these five young militants.

The use of *Das Opfer* to illustrate the barbarity to which left-wing partisans in China were continually subjected must be seen in parallel with Kollwitz's 1919 engraving on the death of Karl Liebknecht (*Gedenkblatt für Karl Liebknecht*), a work whose reproduction was also circulated in Shanghai. Here too, the presence of a mother and her baby, eyes resting on the calm face of the assassinated Spartacist, adds a tragic heaviness to the composition as a whole. There is no escape from this vision of a wall of impassive, inquiring or gloomy faces.

In much of his writing, Lu Xun returned to his fascination for the thematic evolution that drove the artistic career of Käthe Kollwitz. Resistance, maternal love, and death fill the well of empathy with the weak that he perceived in all of her work.

Gathering information about and collecting original engravings also fueled Lu Xun's interest in Käthe Kollwitz.[11] He acquired works on German engraving through his friend Xu Shiquan. As a student in Germany, he was able to take or send catalogs to him. This is how he had access to the writing of Otto Nagel (1894–1967), another person who was involved in the issue of

10 On 18 March 1926, two of his students at École normale supérieure were killed during a demonstration against Japanese imperialism.

11 Besides Lu Xun's actions, the Modern Woodcut Research Society was created to collect funds for the purchase of German works.

revolution in the arts.[12] The other important figure in the discovery of Käthe Kollwitz's work in China was the American journalist Agnes Smedley, who acted as a go-between for the purchase of original engravings.[13]

Although the two artists never met, Käthe Kollwitz knew of the existence of her Chinese collector through this war correspondent who followed the Eighth Route Army.[14] Agnes Smedley wrote the introduction, translated into Chinese, for a monograph published by Lu Xun and dedicated to Käthe Kollwitz (*Käthe Kollwitz's Prints Florilegium*). The work includes a portfolio published by Emil Richter in Dresden in 1930 that he combines with his collection. Two prefaces were published in succession—one by Lu Xun and the other by Agnes Smedley (*Käthe Kollwitz—the People's Artist*).

The reception of Soviet realism was to represent for Lu Xun an awareness that the recourse of European art from 1934 to the most avant-garde tendencies had failed. Contrary to Chinese xylography, Lu Xun wanted to see in the development of Soviet engraving (*sulian banhua*) the expression of the success of a model. Moreover, in several of his written works he returned to the caricatured appearance of prints showing bloodthirsty revolutionaries that was quite far removed from reality. The circulation of Soviet art in China and, more specifically, engraving was a means of becoming aware of the artistic vitality of a nation that, at the time, contrasted with the lackluster nature of Chinese creativity.[15]

Criticism of the formal abstraction of traditional painting was once again used to show the urgency of returning to a more realist treatment that broke with the game of pointless interpretation.[16] Another way of envisaging the evolution of wood engraving in the Soviet Union rested on the variety of styles used to depict the path to socialism. The movements of realism were a

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12 Otto Nagel, *Käthe Kollwitz* (Desden: Verlag der Kunst, 1963).

13 A. Smedley, *The Chinese Woodcut: A New Art Form for the 400 Million* (New York: Touchstone Press, 1996).

14 Lu Xun owned sixteen original reproductions signed by the artist.

15 "The woodcut is a form of graphic art long known in China, but it suffered a period of decline, and when five years ago it revived, the techniques were taken from Europe and had no connection with our old Chinese woodcuts. . . . Now this exhibition provides us with many excellent models," Lu Xun, "Ji sulian banhua zhanlanhui" [The Exhibition of Soviet Graphic Art, 17 February 1936], in Lu Xun, *Selected Works, Vol. 4* (Foreign Languages Press, 2003), 253–55 (first edition, 1956).

16 Lu Xun spoke of the vacuity of some Chinese paintings which consisted in using brush strokes that could evoke the shape of an unspecified bird (a falcon or a swallow). Lu Xun preferred realism and truth to this indecisiveness.

laboratory for detecting the influence of social movements at an artistic level and in this sense appeared to be *art in progress*. In this initial reflection concerning revolutionary realism (*geming xianshizhuyi*), Käthe Kollwitz remained a model to follow.

Following the death of Lu Xun in 1936, the members of the various groups affiliated to the circulation of xylography helped to plan, from their base in Yan'an, the constitution of a revolutionary art renouncing, for the time being, the critical legacy left by Lu Xun but maintaining the contribution of humanism and empathy.[17] Jiang Feng, Li Hua, Gu Yan, and Li Qun, all of whom held positions of great responsibility after the official birth of the People's Republic of China, strived to continue referring to the work of Käthe Kollwitz. Before the birth of the People's Republic of China, reproductions were circulated widely to inspire a spirit of revolt during the Japanese invasion and, henceforth, to echo the battles led by the liberation army. The influence of Käthe Kollwitz is thus perfectly illustrated by the tributes paid following the announcement of her death in 1945 in the *Liberation Daily* (*Jiefang ribao*).[18]

From the early 1950s, the adoption of the Soviet model took a more radical turn. The translations of theoretical texts in the official fine arts review (*Meishu*), the arrival of the renowned artist (Konstantin Maksimov was taken on by the Ministry of Culture in 1955 in China where he taught at the China Central Academy of Fine Arts) and the sending of students in 1953 to the Soviet Union to the Repin Art Academy in Leningrad were the final stage in the adoption of the Soviet model at the level of schools and academies.[19] This movement was accompanied by the desire to popularize oil painting.[20] Dur-

17 Situated on the cliffs of the Loess plateau, Yan'an was the main communist base after the retreat of the Soviets from Jiangxi (Zhonghua suweiai gongheguo) in 1934, which triggered the beginning of the Long March. It was also at Yan'an that the first direct attacks against intellectuals occurred. See Mao Zedong, "Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art," *Selected Works, Vol. 3* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1967); D. E. Apter, "Le discours comme pouvoir: Yan'an et la révolution chinoise," *Cultures & Conflits* 13–14 (Spring 1994). See also Merle Goldman, *China's Intellectuals: Advise and Dissent* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981).

18 T. H. Chang, *War and Popular Culture: Resistance in Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

19 Z. X. Ai, "Sulian de youhua yishu," *Meishu* 11 (1954): 7. "Huanying sulian youhua zhuanjia K.M. Maksimov," *Meishu* (1955): 39.

20 Julia Andrew makes particular mention of the influence exerted by the translation of a text by Nedoshivin: "Realism is a creative method for progressive artists." See Andrew, Julia Andrew, *Painters and Politics in the People's Republic of China, 1949–1979* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 432.

ing this new stage, interest in Käthe Kollwitz remained very marked. However, although her humanism and her involvement in the workers' cause were once again praised, a more technical aspect henceforth illustrated her importance during this formal period of reflection on realism.

Once again, Käthe Kollwitz was called upon to serve as a spearhead at the dawn of a popular aesthetic (*minzhong de shenmei*) based on the concrete model, veracity and clarity. As a major admirer of Lu Xun, Li Hua was to serve as professor at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing (*zhongyang meishu xueyuan*) from the 1950s until his death in 1994. In his teaching, he asked his students to reproduce the works of Kollwitz. The idea launched by Lu Xun in Shanghai to increase awareness of Käthe Kollwitz in order to liberate people's consciences was henceforth an integral part of the academic teaching structure of communist China.

Not until after the death of Mao in 1976 and the return to power of personalities of artistic life (Jiang Feng, president of the Association of Chinese Artists)—victims of the Cultural Revolution—did a group of amateur artists, the Stars (*xingxing*), take on responsibility for the legacy of Käthe Kollwitz. The artists' association the Stars (*xingxing huishe*), founded in 1978, was considered by a large number of specialists to represent the return of avant-garde practices in China.

This new reference to Käthe Kollwitz, like the standard bearer of a group of artists involved in the broadening of artistic freedom of expression, gave her back her humanist and denunciatory dimension. Although wood engraving in Germany had an exceptional history, far removed from its historic evolution in China, the intrinsically educational and moral virtues of the engravings of Käthe Kollwitz served to reveal an art form in evolution, moving from the avant-garde to the rear guard.

35

The Eastern Connection: Depictions of Soviet Central Asia

Aliya Abykayeva-Tiesenhausen

From the establishment of tight Soviet control over Central Asia in the 1940s, and toward the beginnings of the nuclear and space ages, orientalist paradigms have been redeployed within art and propaganda production in the USSR. Soviet orientalism remains the untold story manifested by discrepancies between the expanding bibliography on the art of the Soviet Union and its lack of integration within the established field of postcolonial studies and its methodologies. The urgency of such integration is fueled by increasing tensions within the former Soviet Bloc today.

Masquerading as a form of multinationalism, the imperial project of the Soviet state—with its political and social constructs surrounding both Soviet art and Soviet Central Asian policies—governed Soviet visual production. Soviet totalitarianism was not only a social framework, but also a visual experiment; art institutions and models of visual production during the period constituted separate realms of power. Stalin's terror provided a context for the development of the "total visual space" of socialist realism, which extended toward Central Asian artists and art institutions. The orientalist question is further complicated by the creation of new art forms within the territory of

Soviet Central Asia. Inevitably, the introduction of new art institutions and practices had its underlying political and social contexts. Works by Russian artists living in Central Asia highlight the question of artistic lineage in relation to nineteenth-century Russian orientalist art. The cases of native artists are demonstrative of the main issues Central Asian art faced during the period, including the battles for identity and survival (artistic or otherwise) that were fought within the Central Asian Soviet republics, which were themselves new political creations.

Firm connections exist between socialist realist visual art, Soviet identity-creation processes, and later nationalist sentiments, which led to the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Examinations of Soviet art strategies shed light on the historical sociopolitical constructs and point to the continuing existence of power-driven representational processes.

Two decades have passed since the fall of the Berlin Wall—two decades that brought destruction and change but, most importantly, opened new pathways and destroyed old borders. The time is ripe for a new look at the art of the Soviet Union, a country that no longer exists, yet whose history shapes today's world. One of the least raised research questions in the field of post-Soviet art studies remains that of Soviet colonies and their relationship with the Soviet center.

Central Asia today comprises five republics in which the identity of the adult population has been shaped by Soviet education and culture, as well as by the experience of a turbulent breakup phase and a period of new state-building. Coming from Kazakhstan, the only Central Asian republic which borders Russia, I have an interest not only in its history—a century of which took place within the borders of the Soviet Union—but also in ways of incorporating an analysis of the art of the Soviet period into the broader study of power relationships within the Soviet Union and its official nationality policies for Soviet Central Asia. The vast majority of texts on the USSR's cultural history remain very Moscow-centric in perspective. Indeed, in a way they avoid one of the Soviet era's most potent contradictions between Moscow and the periphery or, more precisely, between Russia and its Central Asia.

The binary nature of the Soviet art apparatus, and with it that of post-Soviet art criticism, highlights one contradiction: equality for all as opposed to

authority above all.[1] It is a truly Orwellian opposition, which might possibly be relayed into a national question. Where the national system was supposedly horizontal, hence the marching nations within paintings being all on the same physical level, it also possessed horizontal expression, thus containing a supposedly more civilized character at its center with other ethnically diverse members of the nation surrounding it or following suit.

The East/West of Buck-Morss's *Dreamworld and Catastrophe* (2000) is the East/West of the Cold War.[2] As is often observed, this dichotomy only presupposes two overarching players, and discussions of Soviet art often support this, even if they do so in a deconstructive mode. The Soviet's own East/West involves, however, a different political structure, that of Russia/Central Asia. For the West of the Cold War this Soviet East is a doubly removed notion. If the East/West discourse of the Cold War was structured, and arguably continues to be structured, along the lines of progress and development versus backwardness and evil, what does it leave for a further removed East-of-East? The orientalism of the Soviet Union is the visual realization of this political and geographical otherness. In this doubly removed context, both of power relations and of theory dominance, the question of the Soviet inner Other finds its own place.

Discussing and contextualizing oil painting within a Russian tradition leads to conclusions of anachronism, lack of quality, eruption of quantity, and restriction of expression. The analysis of oil painting within other Soviet territories, especially in Central Asia, leads to further unsettling questions. One such question stems from the introduction of the medium (and the means of its exhibition, namely museums and galleries) into cultures not previously accustomed to visual imagery, fine art, or realistic depiction. Art institutions such as galleries and training facilities, as well as artist unions, were all modeled on a general and overwhelming Soviet version. However, if this Soviet version was related to a preceding Russian one then for Central Asian republics this experience was new. Ceramic making, rug making, and the applied arts of preceding generations were carried out in similar socialist realist

1 As addressed in Boris Groys, *Искусство Утопии: Gesamtkunstwerk Сталин, Статьи* (Moscow: KhZh, 1993) and Vladimir Paperny, *Kul'tura 2* (Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2006).

2 Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West* (Cambridge, MA, and London: MIT Press, 2000).

modes, but it was oil painting that defined the processes of art production, whether for official or underground Central Asian artists throughout the second half of the twentieth century.

The proper analysis of Russian orientalism is not useful to either side of the Soviet East/West equation. And the fact that such orientalism was played out on the outmoded and anachronistic canvas of oil painting has simply fueled skepticism as to the relevance of any discussions for today's political or artistic milieus. It is even questionable whether, for example, Semion Chuikov's *A Daughter of Soviet Kyrgyzia* (1948) can be construed as an orientalist work of art (Plate 35.1). Indeed, can it even be regarded as a successful painting? Would there be any use in examining the reality of the depicted situation?

A Daughter of Soviet Kyrgyzia was, and still remains, one of the main images that springs to mind for post-Soviet people at the mention of Central Asian art of the Stalin period. The artist Semion Chuikov was born in Kyrgyzia, but was of ethnic Russian origin and educated in Russia. The painting was exhibited in Moscow and in 1949 was given the highest award for a work of art, the Stalin Prize. Such recognition of the work immediately gave it an almost iconic status and led to the widespread dissemination of copies. There are at least three painted versions in existence. But more importantly, there are countless photographic reproductions. In terms of public memory, the illustrations produced in schoolbooks and distributed right across the USSR were especially effective. To this day "Kyrgyzia" is to Russians a girl lost amid the steppes.

The image is of a solitary female child walking across an empty field toward an invisible goal. She holds her head high and her hand tightly clutches some unidentified books. Each detail is given the utmost importance in the piece. Made up of primary colors, the composition culminates in the bright red scarf on the girl's head; her mind is clearly possessed by Soviet or communist doctrine. The shape of the costume is modest, undeniably feminine and devoid of any national connotations, yet her face is definitely Asian and slightly rounded; she is no doubt a well-fed Kyrgyz child. Her stance and gait show her to be in good health and possessing physical strength. The background shows an idyllic and peaceful landscape under a clear blue sky.

The girl is at once an emancipated, Central Asian heroine, the new future of the Soviet woman, and the forever young and forever feminine im-

age of the Soviet East. Yet she is also the object of the Russian gaze, which can be identified as male, adult, and progressive. The relationship signified is that of parent and child, of educator and student, of powerful male and subjugated female.

When the image of a whole nation, even one so small a nation as Soviet Kyrgyzia, rests heavily on one oil painting of a girl walking through an empty steppe clutching a book in her hand, there must be very powerful forces of representation at play. The daughter of Soviet Kyrgyzia is walking away from the imperialist past and toward an imaginary future. The painting now rests at the State Tretyakov Gallery in the Russian, and previously Soviet, capital city of Moscow. However, at the time of writing this thesis it is not on display.

This painting had a lot of power in an almost political sense; it had the power to grip people's minds, to alter, or create perceptions, to be seen, to be remembered, and to be loved. This power rested upon the significance of several diverse factors, such as the appropriateness of the painting's subject, the painterly style, the celebrity of the artist, and the means for dissemination available when all the aforementioned factors had successfully been put together.

This Soviet Kyrgyz girl is not shown as a barbaric creature of the East, nor is she dressed up in special costume. In fact, she is not even an example of exotic femininity. She is a new woman and her Asian features, together with her modern costume, exemplify her belonging to part of a larger whole. Being a Soviet girl she wears a red scarf.

Chuikov was not an ordinary Soviet artist. He is heralded as the founder of the painterly tradition in Kyrgyzstan and he was the head of the artists' union there, as well as a Soviet academician. However, he did learn his trade at VKhuTeMas-VKhuTeIn, an institution at which he was taught by, among others, Robert Falk and various prominent avant-garde artists or "formalist" artists of the early twentieth century.

The girl, of an undefined age and with a plump face, tight grip, and upright posture, is neither conventionally attractive nor barbarically repulsive. This apparent ambivalence or nonspecificity is further echoed in the landscape. Do we see a steppe or a field, or a steppe that is to become a field? The girl's attitude is double-edged and she is both a proud woman and a stubborn child. She represents the new Soviet Kyrgyzia to the public of the time and is

essentially a metaphorical blank canvas on which all sorts of new information can be inscribed. For us, she is also an image of the young Soviet Kyrgyzia as her past is being continuously erased and her future is uncertain.

Did this image deliver a certain message? Was it a message of progress, emancipation, and reassurance? Was this a message deemed necessary for all schoolchildren to receive at the time and also much later on? *A Daughter of Soviet Kyrgyzia* was not alone in its protagonist's desire to gaze. Yet there is a problem. Chuikov renders the girl's gaze impotent and allows the viewer the pleasure of a much more powerful and overwhelming gaze. With the angle of the composition her figure pushes up into the sky and she becomes a monument to illusive freedom and a reminder of an obliterated past. Her safety in the middle of the field is somewhat uncertain as she is too alone, too tidy, and too proud.

The girl in Chuikov's painting is forever young. The model for his painting has, however, aged. It seems that her schooling, if it at all took place, brought the communist utopia into the village, rather than the young girl into the future. This girl from Soviet Kyrgyzia was allowed to look ahead, but never managed to walk out of the village she was born in. According to Matthew Cullerne Bown's recollections of his travels in Kyrgyzia, the woman who posed for the image was still residing in the same place Chuikov allegedly found her forty years earlier.[3] Nevertheless, the artist became a celebrity and there is now a museum dedicated to his life and art in Bishkek, the capital of Kyrgyzstan.

First and foremost, *A Daughter of Soviet Kyrgyzia* is an oil painting that received high acclaim at the time of its production. It represents its time both in form and in function, the latter of which was to illustrate the progress of previously repressed Central Asian lands and women. In itself, the work is not at all insulting for the Kyrgyz audience, nor is it insulting to women, or to either religious or atheist views. It lacks the grandeur of more recognizable examples of socialist realism and yet it does not deviate from socialist realist norms. It is in fact so noninsulting and unprovocative as a work of art, both in socialist realist terms and for today's audience, that I am constantly surprised as to how it manages to escape finding a place in the pantheon of newly ac-

3 From a conversation with Matthew Cullerne Bown during my time as an assistant at his Izo Gallery, London, in 2004.

cepted socialist realist works of art of the Groys/Degot curatorial school that controls the exhibition circuit today. This is certainly one thing that keeps my interest in socialist realist orientalism strong: the continuous absence of the subject not only from the political arena, but also from the realm of both long-standing and highly acclaimed art theory and criticism.[4]

I would like to highlight the split between active and expanding hegemonic post-Soviet and postcommunist scholarship on Soviet and communist subjects and the less apparent, and yet probably more legitimate, authority of the postcolonial voice in relation to the same issues. This voice is representative of the perpetual weakness of the colonial subject, in my case the Soviet Central Asian subject, and its perpetual representation, as opposed to self-reflection; crucially, the two instances are closely interlinked. This third constant forms a bridge to another area of art historical and cultural scholarship, namely that of broader postcolonial studies as identified with its most prominent speakers, namely the late Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, and Gayatri Spivak. Postcolonialism has become a recognized academic discourse and a body of canonical texts emerged in this field during the second half of the twentieth century. However, a contemporary disproportion between power over representation and possession of knowledge, or in this case influential knowledge and the means of its dissemination, shows that in the twenty-first century we are witnessing a reintroduction of imperialist structures (both by Russia in particular and the West in general) in a mutated form, but possibly with a wider and more substantial grasp.

An examination of cultural or, particularly in this case, visual output is an attempt to empower the voice of the represented group, namely formerly Soviet Central Asians. Critical discussions of such a voice reside between several main categories or definitions. These involve issues of time and generations that are closely interlinked with the idea of a political and social context. These are all present during both the creation of depictions and self-

4 The most notable exception was the exhibition in Oxford, organized on the basis of the private collection of Matthew Cullerne Bown who, in spite of publishing several works on socialist realism, remains largely excluded from the academic community, probably due to his status as an art dealer. As the title of the exhibition makes explicit, the content reached beyond the usually Russian-centric domain. David Elliot and Matthew Cullerne Bown, eds. *Soviet Socialist Realist Painting, 1930s–1960s: Paintings from Russia, the Ukraine, Belorussia, Uzbekistan, Kirgizia, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Moldova* (Oxford: Museum of Modern Art, 1992).

depictions and the process of critical writing. Furthermore, there exists the notion of position, which can be interpreted in two ways. There is the appreciation of the within/without confrontation or simply the view from inside or outside of the discussed geographical and intellectual sphere. This is further complicated as "post-Soviet" and "postcolonial" are terms that may or may not coincide in temporal terms with the territories of, for example, the UK, Russia, and Kazakhstan.

The analysis of socialist realist depictions of the Soviet Other is compiled from a series of palpable tensions. The main tensions are geopolitical and historic, both of which are problematic due to a significant distancing between the writer and the subject of research. Not only is there a generational issue in the fact that the new generation of art historians is only superficially aware of the former Soviet situation; there is also the fact that the reactions of post-Soviet scholars, even within one generation, vary from that of post-Western (or neo-Western) scholars.[5] On the other hand, as suggested in the previous sentence, there is a continuous reevaluation of the notion of the Other. In this case, this might encompass Russian, Soviet, Central Asian, Muslim, Secular, Eastern European, and more. The terms may sometimes overlap but they by no means coincide with one another. Within the framework of a postcommunist, postcolonial, socio-cultural study of art history, autoethnography is an area that requires persistent and conscious evaluation.

As a result of the overtly colonial attitudes Moscow exercised toward the Asian republics of the Soviet Union, the people residing in these territories became the victims of progress, that is to say they became victims of a dramatic change in economic and social conditions which involved the denial of some or all of their fundamental rights. Slavoj Žižek argues that a fundamental right of human beings is not necessarily the right to truth but the right to narrate or "the right to tell your story."[6] In a way this particular

5 There is a certain void within the international field of cultural (and other) research, which manifests itself in the absence of bipolar divisions prevalent during the Cold War era. While terms such as post-Communist or former-Soviet and former-East come into use, no applicable equivalents for the West have come into force. The issue is beginning to be raised, especially as part of dedications to the twentieth anniversary since the fall of the Berlin Wall. Most notable is probably "Former West." According to organizers, "the project aims at articulating the processes of the West 'becoming former' that, however unacknowledged by the West itself, began with the demise of the Cold War construct of a bipolar world in 1989" (formerwest.org).

6 Slavoj Žižek and Glyn Daly, *Conversations with Žižek* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004), 141.

right was not entirely taken away, but the means by which Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, and Uzbeks were required and allowed to tell their story became so dramatically different from what they were accustomed to that it is possible to suggest that for some time these nations were left without the ability to fully express themselves.

Nationality and nationalism are still largely disputed subjects in Central Asia. However, steps toward the construction of an identity cannot be viewed as having roots in the independence of 1991 only, or even in the 1986 December revolt.[7] Art structures of the Soviet era, as well as depictions of Central Asians in Soviet paintings, are valid examples of stereotype and identity construction. In the art world of the Soviet Union, the period between the 1940s and 1980s was characterized by socialist realism and various direct reactions to it (such as underground art and later SocArt). This period affected the Central Asian consciousness giving it, for now, a schizophrenic edge. Central Asia became both Soviet and Asian, traditional and contemporary, Western and Eastern, and at the same time none of these.

Central Asia is predominantly visible to the Western gaze through the screen of Russian history. Central Asians are keen to explore both their ancient history and its contemporary modifications within society, while Western critics insist on seeing, for example, Kazakhstan as just a center for Stalin's gulag and Soviet nuclear testing. The Central Asian stereotype consequently varies significantly inside and outside of the region, as facets of it are Central Asian, Russian and Western. While the first two stereotypes are based significantly, if not consciously, on Soviet socialist realist imagery, the latter relies on a mix of real and portrayed Stalinist horrors as well as Borat-style self-serving Western misrepresentation.

In Kazakhstan the question of national identity remained a characteristic feature of art throughout its development. Tensions between the real and the abstract, the Self and the Other, and the acceptable and the unusual were all nurtured in the Kazakh art of the 1960s and 1970s, a time when freedom,

7 The issue of contemporary monuments in Almaty is further analyzed by me in a paper presented at the 2008 Association of Art Historians Annual Conference in London: "From War Memorial to the Beatles: Locating Kazakh Monu-Mentality." It shows that while national identity is heavily propagated, nationalism is kept at a lower level of exposition. The 1986 revolt, which has a specific memorial dedicated to it, was a Kazakh nationalist uprising against a Moscow-appointed ethnically Russian head of republic.

however elusive, first became imaginable. This generation of artists proved to be asking similar questions in their works—questions related to national identity—even though these questions were still enclosed in oil paintings.

By the end of the 1980s, and certainly by the beginning of the 1990s, the entire world was being transformed. The Soviet Union went through perestroika under Gorbachev and then collapsed and disintegrated in 1991. The Central Asian republics each gained independence. The late 1980s and early 1990s produced chaos and uncertainty to the political, economic, and social life of the region. Economic crisis only stimulated the revolution in art.

The year 1989 was significant in Kazakh and Central Asian art history as the year the first uncensored exhibition was held. *The Crossroads* gathered a variety of artists belonging to a number of independent (not-state-sponsored) groups such as the Green Triangle and the Night Tram. The exhibition highlighted the wealth of alternative art practice in existence alongside official oil painting and sculpture. A large proportion of it was ephemeral, including extremely new and, for the period, controversial installations, happenings, and performances. Being at the forefront of the new avant-garde in Kazakhstan, the artists gained little recognition outside peculiarly segregated art circles. By the 1990s art no longer seemed to attract governmental interest, nor was it perceived to be contentious, thus allowing almost total creative freedom.

The varied nature of the works of art created at this time was symptomatic of the split in personalities and an artistic tension that has its origins in the socialist realist period of Kazakh art. A strong sense of the need for social involvement counters an exploration of a fragile identity, both personal and national, which utilizes both factual and invented histories. Nomadism, tradition, and modernity find their way into Western-inspired forms of art production.

The period between the Soviet and post-Soviet eras allowed art to flourish— however, as Irina Yuferova notes, it was short-lived.[8] Without boundaries and criticism, art in Central Asia ended up without identity. The 1990s were characterized by increasing commercialization and the creation of an art market. However, it was the artists who established themselves as cultural

8 Irina Yuferova, "The 1990s: Sweet Decade of Hope," in *Art from Central Asia: A Contemporary Archive*, Central Asia Pavilion, Venice Biennale 2005, curator Viktor Misiano (Bishkek: Kurama Art, 2005), 68–72.

experiments in the 1980s by continuing to stretch the boundaries in the 1990s, provoking the press and public with their gestures and performances, but gaining at least some attention. To this day, artists in Kazakhstan battle with the limited notion of art practice, an inheritance of the Soviet era.

Saule Suleimenova's *Self Portrait* (1989) is an expression of the layers of tension that characterized Central Asian identity at that moment. Neither abstract nor realist, the painting is nevertheless an exploration of silence, fear, and newly discovered courage—to express oneself, to demand attention, to think in one's own language. In her most recent series, *Kazakh Chronicle* (2008), Suleimenova addresses the layering of identity processes—utilizing photographs of writings on walls and gates, she paints over them images drawn from nineteenth-century ethnographic photographs, chance encounters with strangers, villagers, and town dwellers—all gathered to compose a fragmented view of Kazakh-ness.

Discourses surrounding both Russian orientalism and Central Asian art and culture have intensified over the last five years, while at the same time there is a lack of integration between the two fields. Cultural production largely remains outside discussions on Central Asian and wider post-Soviet identities. Although, as this article has attempted to highlight, cultural and visual creation is not peripheral to the construction of national and personal identities in this region.

Orientalist paradigms have been redeployed within art and propaganda production in the USSR. While political structures governed both art production and nationality policy during Stalin's rule, today regional and international politics govern visual imagery and cultural processes in Central Asia and across the globe. Stalinist terror, World War II, and the Soviet nuclear program were all contexts for socialist realism. The war in Chechnya, war between Russia and Georgia, conflicts between Central Asian states, and war in Afghanistan and Iraq are not just contexts for contemporary visual imagery and art, but they are also contexts for contemporary analyses of the Soviet past. Posing research questions in relation to the preceding epochs reveals conflicting meanings. Depicting Central Asia is no longer the domain of socialist realist artists, but orientalism haunts both the process itself and its discourse.

36

The Visualization of the Third Way in Tito's Yugoslavia

Tanja Zimmermann

From 1945 to the end of the 1950s, the media policy in Yugoslavia developed in accordance with the politically and ideologically ambiguous course between the extreme dynamics of the East and the West. Only a few years after Yugoslavia was excluded from the Cominform, Tito and his ideologists adopted the term "third way" as a keyword to designate the Yugoslav politics during the Cold War, which maneuvered between two global powers. Originally, the term had been coined by the Soviets to denigrate the Yugoslav deviation from the Soviet "straight line." During the 1950s, however, Tito and his ideologists incorporated the term into their political vocabulary and turned it into a positive slogan. Later, after the huge conference of the Non-Aligned Movement in Belgrade in 1961, diverse ideologies of the "third way," or even of a "third world," followed one another in fast succession to underscore Yugoslavia's distinction from both the East and the West. Diverse artistic canons were adapted to the image of the "new" Yugoslavia and were integrated into it in a syncretistic way.

After World War II the Yugoslav media first adopted the rules of socialist realism of Soviet origin. After the separation from the Soviet Union in 1948,

this concept was replaced by a kind of neo-avant-garde, which was still modeled on Russian examples—this time on Russian constructivism—but it was used to articulate the difference and the leading role of Yugoslavian socialism.[1] In around 1950, a specific Yugoslav form of new primitivism expressed through the art of the naives emerged, which corresponded best with the diverse Yugoslav folk traditions.[2] In the mid-1950s, advertising photography became the main medium of propaganda.[3] At the same time, being an iconic and indexical sign, photographs verified the achievements of Yugoslav socialism. In the late 1950s, it was landscape photography, especially that of Tošo Dabac, that created an image of Yugoslavia as a new continent between the East and the West.

Until the separation of Yugoslavia from the Cominform on 28 June 1948, the reshaping of the country took place according to the Soviet paradigm. Front pages of Yugoslav newspapers were occupied by the Soviet festive and commemoration days as if they were part of the Yugoslav national memory. The front page of the newspaper *The Republic* on 28 January 1947 was devoted to the commemoration of Lenin's death, followed by an interview with Stalin, borrowed from the Soviet news agency TASS.[4] On 28 February 1947, *The Republic* celebrated the twenty-ninth anniversary of the Red Army, which had conquered the enemy in a joint battle with Tito's partisans.[5] The central theme of *The Republic* on 9 September 1947 was an apotheosis of the eternal city of Moscow, the home of progress, freedom, and humanity.[6] Journalists reported on exhibitions of Soviet painters (Gerasimov, Deyneka, and Plastova) and sculptors (Mukhina, Merkurov, and Shader) and reproduced their masterpieces in Yugoslav newspapers.[7] Literature and art followed the

1 Tanja Zimmermann, "Copying the Soviet Imperial Narratives: Tito's 'Third Path'—A Neo-Avant-Garde of Marxism," *Word & Sense: A Journal of Interdisciplinary Theory and Criticism in Czech Studies* 9–10 (2009): 148–58.

2 Tanja Zimmermann, "Socialistic Neo-Primitivism in Art History in Tito's Yugoslavia," in *The History of Art History in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe*. ed. Jerzy Malinowski (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Tako, 2012), 211–16.

3 Tanja Zimmermann, "Jugoslawien als neuer Kontinent—politische Geografie des 'dritten Weges,'" in *Jugoslawien—Libanon: Verhandlungen von Zugehörigkeit in den Künsten fragmentierter Kulturen*, eds. Miranda Jakiša and Andreas Pflitsch (Berlin: Kadmos, 2012), 73–100.

4 *Republika*, 28 January 1947, 1.

5 *Republika*, 28 February 1947, 1.

6 *Republika*, 9 September 1947, 1.

7 *Republika*, 21 October 1947, 3, 4.

Figure 36.1.
Tošo Dabac, "Quarry on the island Brač," in *Yugoslavia: Illustrated Magazine,* edited by Oto Bihalji-Merin (Belgrade, 1949), 22.

rules of socialist realism, learned from the Soviet artists. In 1946, Antun Augustinčić, president of the Union of Yugoslav Artists, raised a monument celebrating the achievements of the Red Army in Batina Skela on the Danube.[8] The allegorical personification of the Soviet army with a sword and a torch in her hands combines elements of the antique sculpture of *Nike of Samotracia* and Vera Mukhina's *A Worker and a Peasant Woman*, which were exhibited in front of the Soviet pavilion at the World Exhibition in Paris in 1937. Similar to Mukhina's prototype, Augustinčić's sculpture, too, is placed on a gigantic pedestal. Another Yugoslav counterpart to Mukhina's sculptor was Slavko Pengov's monumental fresco in Tito's villa at Lake Bled, which had won first prize, awarded by the Committee for Culture and Art.[9] The wall paintings show the victorious partisan army leading the poor workers and peasants to liberty.

Until 1948, the Yugoslav Partisan leader Josip Broz Tito had been planning to build up new federations, which would not only include the Federative Communist Republic of Yugoslavia but also the Balkan countries and those of the Danube. The new empire of the "middle" was to incorporate not only the Yugoslav republics as a *summa partiorum*, but also Bulgaria, Albania, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, Romania and—after the expected victory of the communists led by General Marcos—Greece. Up to 1947, Stalin and the Soviet system supported Tito entirely. On 23 December 1947, a headline of the newspaper *The Republic* was dedicated to the contracts of friendship that had recently been signed in Pest and Bucharest, with Hungary and Romania respectively.[10] The article praises the Yugoslav federation of six republics "in the heart of the Danube and the Balkans as the first community of a new type." This community had already proven to be organized in a very efficient way. Yugoslavia, according to *The Republic*, serves "as a model and center of gatherings." It evokes confidence and is predestined to lead the initiative of founding a larger community. The project of a future union is legitimized by a portrait of Stalin beside the article, accompanied by the text of

8 *Republika: Mjesečnik za književnost, umjetnost i javna pitanja* 4:3 (1948): 212.

9 Čedomir Minderović, "Nagrade Komiteta za kulturu i umetnost jugoslovanskim književnicima i umetnicima," *Književne novine*: *Organ Saveza književnika Jugoslavije* 4, 9 March 1948, 1–3; Donovan Pavlinec, "Slovenski inženirji človeških duš: Monumentalne stenske poslikave socialističnega realizma," *Zbornik za umetnostno zgodovino: Nova vrsta* 44 (2008): 114–38.

10 *Republika: Organ jugoslovenske republikanske demokratske stranke*, 23 December 1947, 1.

Yugoslav congratulations on his sixty-eighth birthday. However, there is no photograph of Tito. Even without it, the cover of *The Republic* reiterates Stalin's propaganda presenting the dictator over and over again in good company with Lenin. In 1947, Tito's Lenin was Stalin.

The larger communist Balkan region that some had dreamed of failed because of the ruthless Soviet policy of dominating the whole of Eastern Europe. At the same time, when Yugoslavia separated from the Cominform, Tito's ideologist abandoned Lenin's and Stalin's interpretation of communism and returned to the origins—the early works of Marx and Engels. Yugoslav propaganda followed the same strategy. An anonymous cover illustration of the booklet *Tito contra Stalin* from 1949, where the secret correspondence of both was published, picked up the central element of a famous revolutionary poster that the constructivist artist El Lissitzky had drawn in order to illustrate the civil war in 1919, *Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge*.[11] Here, we are again confronted with a strategy of borrowing which at the same time claims originality. In Lissitzky's poster, sharp and round forms stand for a political-ideological opposition between the Whites and the Reds. A red triangle pierces a white circle. On the cover of the booklet, published in 1949, a red wedge has broken away from the five-pointed star when it is about to pierce the map of Yugoslavia. By adopting the symbolic geometry and, indeed, also the typographic style of early Soviet propaganda, the Yugoslav illustration deconstructs the Soviet emblem. It is certainly the neo-avant-garde strategy that distinguishes the Yugoslavian cover from the Russian original. The imitation deconstructs the prototype by using methods of paraphrase or satirical pastiche.

The photography of the industrial landscape in Yugoslavia imitated the Russian constructivist style by Alexander Rodchenko and Gustav Kljucis, in particular.[12] The photographs taken from extreme angles accompanied the odes to the creation of the Yugoslav system of self-management of the workers.

For a short "interim" period in 1948, Titoists claimed to be the avant-garde of communism. They behaved like a neo-avant-garde coming back to the trauma of early Stalinism in a late Stalinist context. Indeed, pseudo-avant-garde forms appeared only for a short period at the beginning of Tito's

11 Anonymous, [Introduction by the Yugoslavian Central Committee], *Tito contra Stalin. Streit der Diktatoren in ihrem Briefwechsel* (Hamburg: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1949), front page.

12 *Jugoslawien: Illustrierte Zeitschrift*, ed. Oto Bihalji-Merin (Belgrad: Jugoslovenska knjiga,1950), 3–5, 7, 14.

promotion of his "third way." Only when Tito wanted to go back to the origins of communism did the design of propaganda posters and photography take inspiration from Russian constructivism. Shortly afterward, the avant-garde forms gradually disappeared from Yugoslav propaganda and Yugoslavia adhered to a new local canon of "folk and naive art"—some kind of new primitivism. In a strange movement of both constructivism and its Stalinist suppression, the avant-garde was first absorbed and then erased.

The avant-garde view from the new angle (from the side, the top, the bottom) was soon replaced by the neoprimitive "virginal" view at the beginning of the socialist Yugoslav age. The first appearance of the autonomous Yugoslav culture projected Tito's ideologists, especially the Croatian writer Miroslav Krleža, into the medieval heretic sect of the Bogomils.[13] In 1950, Krleža organized a monumental exhibition of Yugoslav medieval art in the Palace of Chaillot in Paris. According to Krleža, the medieval Bosnian sect of the Bogomils developed some kind of "socialism" and abandoned the ideology of the Eastern and the Western Church.[14] Thus, as early as the Middle Ages, Yugoslav sovereignty and the third path between the East and the West had already been anticipated. Before the very eyes of the West European public in Paris, the creation of a new Yugoslav mythology of the third path began. Krleža, vice president of the Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Arts and Tito's intellectual authority, claimed in the preface to the exhibition catalog that the autonomous third way on Yugoslav soil had chosen the Slavic apostles Cyril and Method, as well as the Serbian autonomous Orthodox Church. The Bogomils in particular never followed the Eastern or the Western rules; according to Krleža, this was a political-ideological decision which reached its artistic expression in the Bogomil funeral steles:

> The Bogomil sculptors, liberated from every artistic manner of their time, observed things and phenomena in their environment in their own way and were therefore undoubtedly kinds of inventors. . . . This was naive and

13 On the Yugoslav cult of the Bogomils, see Tanja Zimmermann, "Titoistische Ketzerei: Die Bogomilen als Antizipation des 'dritten Weges' Jugoslawiens," *Zeitschrift für Slawistik* 55:4 (2010): 445–63; Tanja Zimmermann, "From the Haiducks to the Bogomils: Transformation of the Partisan Myth after World War II," in *Kino! 10*, ed. Barbara Wurm (Ljubljana: Društvo za širjenje filmske kulture, 2010), 62–70.

14 Miroslav Krleža, "Die Ausstellung der jugoslawischen mittelalterlichen Malerei und Plastik," *Jugoslawien: Illustrierte Zeitschrift*, ed. Oto Bihalji-Merin (Beograd: Jugoslovenska knjiga, 1950), 52–61.

> fresh observation in an artistic virginal land ("*terra vergine*"), which remained unknown until today. It is a special concept of the world and life, a totally Bogomil cosmology.[15]

Krleža does not interpret the Bogomil steles as ephemeral and low art, but as the last evidence of an autonomous Yugoslav culture, of a "Yugoslav Atlantis." The Bogomil art gave rise to a new interest in primitive art—folk art and the art of naive painters and sculptors who had no academic background.[16] Another promoter of the "third way," namely the Serbian writer and art critic Oto Bihalji-Merin, contributed to its popularization in Yugoslavia and abroad. He compared Tito and his partisans to the rebellious Bogomils.[17] The famous partisan film by Veljko Bulajić, *The Battle on the Neretva* from 1969, was a cinematic apotheosis of the partisans as the Bogomils, where a group of partisans fight to the last behind the Bogomil steles.

Through the prism of anticipation, Krleža turned the old hegemonic cultural transfer from the progressive West to the backward East upside down, and moved the Balkans, the province at the edge of civilization, into the center of Europe. At the Third Congress of Yugoslav Writers in 1952, Krleža even spoke of an interference of centuries in Yugoslav art.[18] He believed that Yugoslav art was constricted to its own circle, in which only the earlier artistic phenomena on Yugoslav soil stimulated the later ones. The art of the neighboring countries beyond the Yugoslav borders was excluded as a possible source of Yugoslav art. Such a patriotic cultural construction was not interested in contingency and connections with other cultures beyond the Yugoslav *chronotopos*.

Moreover, texts and illustrations were organized according to this presumption. They manipulated the coherence of cultures on Yugoslav soil and fabricated new connections. An example of this is the photograph of the antique Diocletian palace and of a relief entitled *Work and Youth* from 1950 by

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15 Miroslav Kerleja, "Preface," in *L'art médiéval yougoslave: Moulages et copies exécutés par des artistes yougoslaves et français*, ed. Paul Deschamps (Paris: Les Presses Artistiques, 1950), 15.

16 Zimmermann, "Jugoslawien als neuer Kontinent."

17 Oto Bihalji-Merin and Lise Bihalji-Merin, *Jugoslawien: Kleines Land zwischen den Welten* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1955), 34, 35.

18 Miroslav Krleža, "Govor na kongresu književnikov u Ljubljani," in *Svjedočanstva vremena: Književno-estetske variacije*, ed. Ivo Frangeš (Sarajevo: Oslobodenje, 1988), 9.

Zdenko Kalin and Karel Putrih, which are put together in such a way that only an expert can see the difference.[19] The sculpture of socialist realism is no longer perceived in the framework of Soviet socialist realism, but as a fragment or a heritage of antique sculpture. The mausoleum and the relief are linked by a sense of anticipation. Through a retrospective view on its own antique beginnings in art on Yugoslavian soil the cultural connections beyond the Yugoslav borders to both East and West were veiled. The relief by Kalin and Putrih was no longer perceived as a product of Soviet influence, but rather as inspired by the antique sculptors of the Diocletian palace. The new Yugoslav patriotism was founded on a confidence that the Yugoslavs live in a country that not only is beautiful, but also has a rich cultural tradition.

From 1949 to 1959, Bihalji-Merin published a splendid twice-yearly illustrated magazine *Yugoslavia*—to begin with in three, but later in as many as five languages: Serbo-Croatian, English, German, French, and Russian. A mixture of propaganda, guidebook, and art magazine, illustrated with art and advertising photographs, the magazine promoted Yugoslavia as a new "continent." The first issue gives an outline of the country under Tito's leadership, in which it appears as a world of its own—a mosaic of nations, landscapes, and traditions: "Yugoslavia is, from the national point of view, a mosaic country. In its territory of only 256,589 square kilometers live five free nations, closely linked but each with its own past, culture, and traditions. Nature herself, like a sculptor moulding a relief, has formed the diversity of this country."[20]

Nationalities merged with the geographic diversity as the Yugoslav territory was subjected to semiotic processes. Beautiful nature and its resources, hard-working people and industrialization under Tito's leadership seemed to guarantee the prosperity of the economy, welfare, and the arts. The diversity of the landscape (the mountains and the lowlands, the industrial surroundings and national parks) and the folklore (costumes, ornaments, dances, and songs) sublimated the religious and national antagonism. Mountains correspond with the Adriatic Sea, factories with antique architecture; the tra-

19 N. Štiler, "Relief 'Arbeit und Jugend' by Zdenko Kalina and Karel Putrih," in *Jugoslawien: Illustrierte Zeitschrift*, ed. Oto Bihalji-Merin (Beograd: Jugoslovenska knjiga, 1950), 113.

20 Anonymous, "Yugoslavia," *Yugoslavia: Illustrated Magazine*, ed. Oto Bihalji-Merin (Beograde: Jugoslovenska knjiga, 1949), vol. 1, 3.

ditional professions of fisherman, shepherd, and peasant with the new professions of construction worker, welder, and telephone operator; and the costumes, dances, and physiognomies of the northern republics with those from the southern ones. The socialist idyll first provided shelter for the peoples of Yugoslavia, and later, since the foundation of the Non-Aligned Movement, also for the peoples from other continents, Africa and Asia. In her essay "The Culture of Lies" (1991–95) Dubravka Ugrešić remarks that the new ideology implied some kind of "internationalism" and "collective cultural space"—"even if only he, namely Tito, traveled, and we could merely admire photographs from foreign countries in the press."[21]

After Yugoslavia, *terra vergine*, was located in the new continent between East and West, a new kind of self-representation dominated the press, which at the same time also responded to the different perception of Yugoslavia abroad, namely in the East and the West. In a clever media strategy, Yugoslavia presented itself as an *ambiguous image*—an image that can be read in two different ideological ways—in the East as a socialistic idyll of workers who can enjoy the fruits of their work, and in the West as a paradise for tourists and consumers. The American economic expert John Kenneth Galbraith, who in 1958 visited Poland and Yugoslavia, perceived the country from the Western point of view:

> The Yugoslavs are not as Calvinist as the Poles. They are committed to supplying consumer goods, including those that must be imported, in the present. This is in line with a pronouncement of Tito, who said that those who won socialism should enjoy at least some of its fruits.[22]

> After the austerity of Poland, I still find myself revelling in the luxury of life here—excellent food or wine, good service and people who seem to be enjoying themselves. I suspect that I am too much of a hedonist to make a good modern socialist. The same might be true of the Yugoslavs.[23]

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21 Dubravka Ugrešić, *Die Kultur der Lüge*, trans. Barbara Antkowiak (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1995), 14.

22 John Kenneth Galbraith, *Journey to Poland and Yugoslavia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958), 79, 80.

23 Ibid., 81.

Galbraith therefore characterizes the Yugoslav third way as "capitalism with social mistakes," or rather "socialism with capitalist mistakes."[24]

Contrary to the above, Bihalji-Merin in his propaganda travel report *Yugoslavia: A Small Country between the Worlds* (1955) interprets the same phenomena of welfare as a result of highly developed socialist production and distribution. In the near future he sees the workers surrounded by entertainment media, living in comfortable apartments, and spending their free time in modern sports facilities and glamorous vacation paradises:

> We would like to establish our industry not only on machines, but also in the consciousness of our people. We would like the workers one day to say: "We do not need only blast furnaces and street mills, but also showers and bathrooms! We cannot get along without a radio set! We need recreation areas with tennis courts!" Until the workers do not ask for that, they will not protect our achievements. Then they will understand machines and handle them better. . . . Some workers have already settled in modern accommodation. Last year some of them had already been at the seaside for the first time.[25]

In around 1960, just before the congress of the Non-Aligned Countries in Belgrade, virtuous photography, especially that of Tošo Dabac and his pupils, managed to draw the Yugoslavia of the new continent closer to the West.[26] Their photographs of Yugoslav national parks apply abstract techniques of early American photography of the frontier from the time of expeditions to Arizona and Colorado in 1870 and 1880.[27] Similarly, like Timothy O'Sullivan, William Henry Jackson, and Carleton E. Watkins, Yugoslav photographers chose their motifs and arranged them in light/dark contrasts. Yugoslavia, at the top of the Non-Aligned Movement, presents itself as a new space and serves as the scenery for numerous East and West German Westerns. The chiefs of Indian tribes from the East and the West, the Frenchman

24 Ibid., 85.

25 Bihalji-Merin and Bihalji-Merin, *Jugoslawien*, 223.

26 *Tošo Dabac: Photographer*, foreword by Radoslav Putar (Zagreb: Grafički zavod Hrvatske, 1969); Živorad Stojković, *Jugoslawien in Form und Gestaltung* (Beograd: Jugoslavija, 1960).

27 Toby Jurovics et al., eds., *Framing the West: The Survey Photographs of Timothy H. O'Sullivan* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010).

Figure 36.2.
M. Grčević, "Park in Dubrovnik," in *Jugoslawien: Illustrierte Zeitschrift*, edited by Oto Bihalji-Merin (Belgrad, 1956), 49.

Pierre Brice and his counterpart, the Serbian Gojko Mitić, a well-known star of the East German films about Indians,[28] fight in the Yugoslav Wild West—the Yugoslav national parks. But the free and proud tribe of Indians in the West differs from the one in the East. The former fights together with Old Shatterhand against non-Christian villains and dies at the end as a Christian. In the death scene in *Winnetou III* (1964–65) by the German filmmaker Harald Reinl, the sound of the church bells announces Winnetou's approach to heaven. The latter, the Eastern one, Tokei-ihto, fights together with his tribe against Western imperialism and capitalism. At the beginning of the film *The Sons of the Great Bear* (1966), an adaptation of the novel cycle by the East German ethnologist and writer Liselotte Welskopf-Heinrich, money is presented as a bad thing which spoils characters and provokes murders. The Yugoslav territory, a reservation camp of the East and of the West, thus now becomes a new frontier. Yugoslavia is a place of encounter for different competing ideologies. Propaganda, and with it advertising, unified the Yugoslav peoples and republics in the aesthetics of national geography. In those days, it was impossible to imagine that Yugoslavia could collapse, but rather that it could go where no man has gone before.

28 Frank-Burkhard Habel, *Gojko Mitić, Mustangs, Marterpfähle: Die DEFA-Indianerfilme: Das große Buch für Fans* (Berlin: Schwarzkopf, 1997); Friedrich von Borries and Jens-Uwe Fischer, *Sozialistische Cowboys: Der Wilde Westen Ostdeutschlands* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2008).

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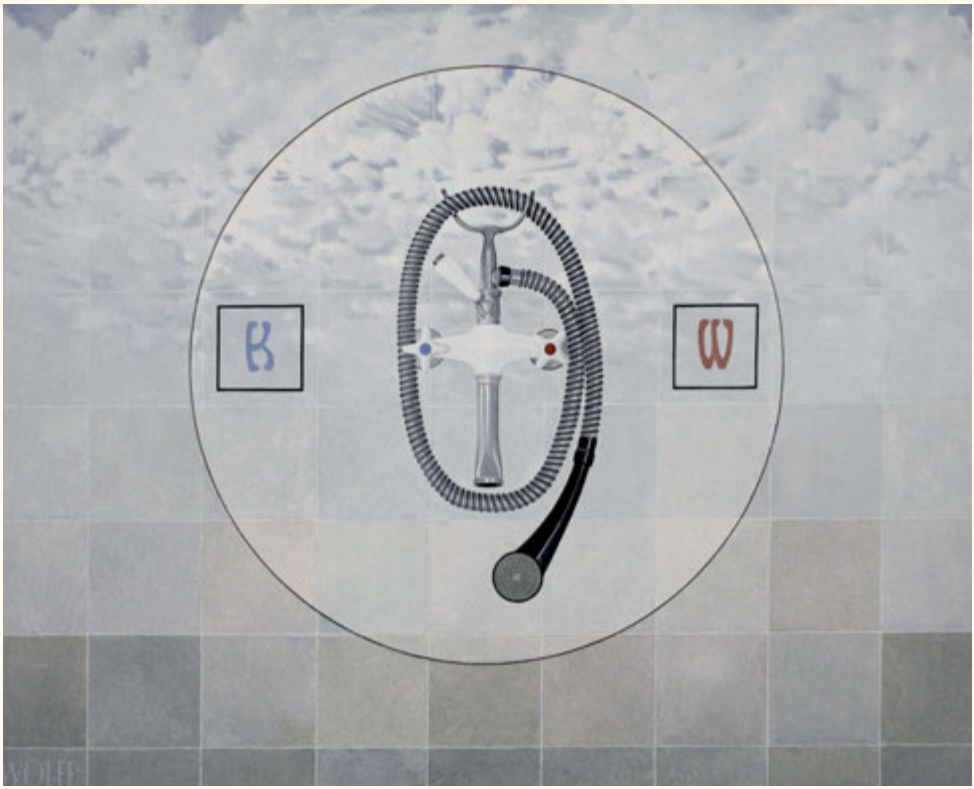

Plate 4.1.

Willy Wolff, *Ein Bad kann himmlisch sein (Die Mischbatterie)*, 1967, oil on wood.

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Plate 4.2.

Willy Wolff, *Artistenbein (Redam)*, 1970/71, oil on wood, 114,5×96 cm.
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Plate 6.1.

Hans Haacke, *Weite und Vielfalt der Brigade Ludwig*, 1984, 225×170 cm.
© VG Bildkunst, Bonn 2013.

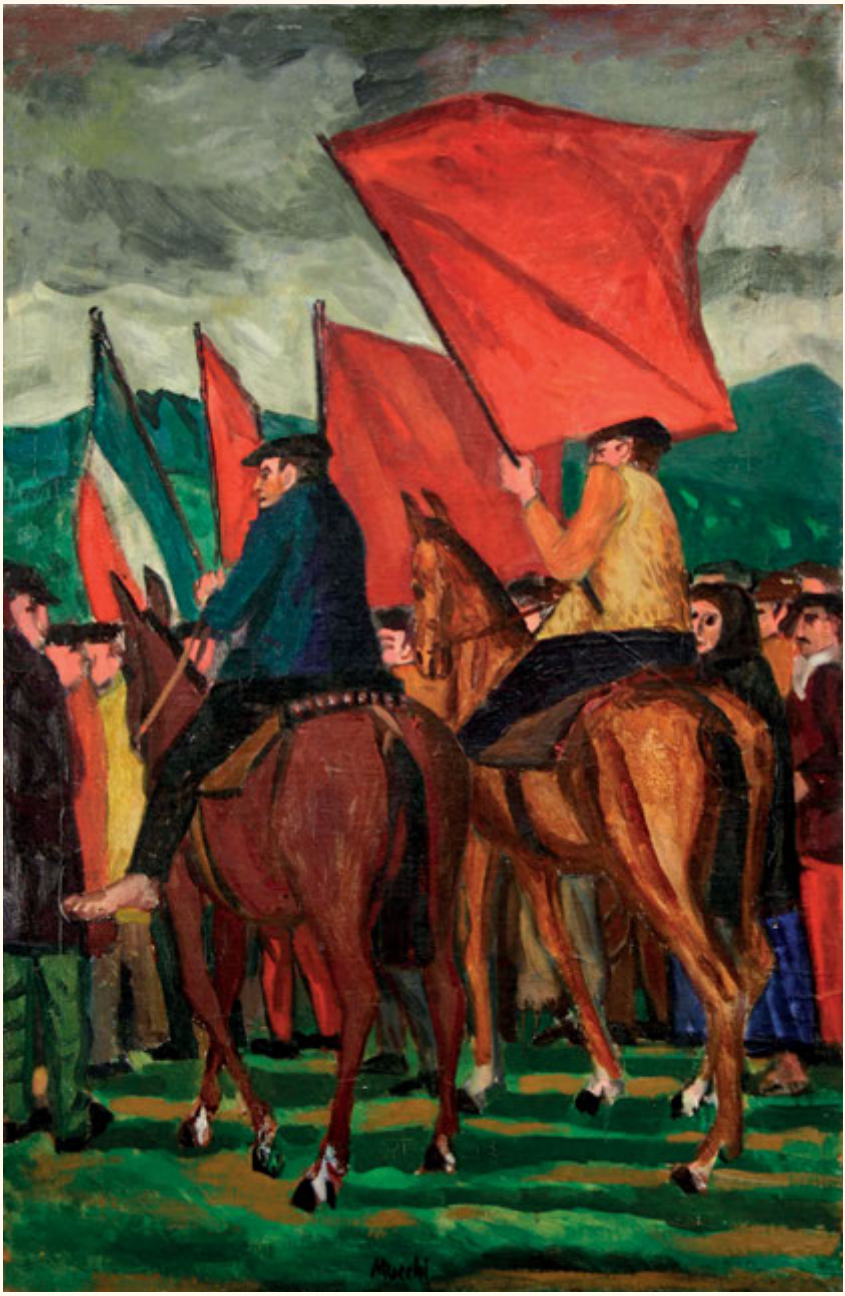

Plate 7.1.

Gabriele Mucchi, *Occupazione delle terre in Sicilia*, 1950, oil on canvas, 76,5×51 cm. Kulturhistorisches Museum Magdeburg. © VG Bildkunst, Bonn 2013.

Plate 7.2.

Gabriele Mucchi, *L'operaio ucciso*, 1950, oil on canvas, 70×100 cm.
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Plate 8.1.
Josep Renau, *Murales de Halle-Neustadt*. Fundació Josep Renau, València.

Plate 11.1.

Renato Guttuso, *Bezrobotni na Piazza di Spagna*, 1952.
The National Museum in Warsaw. © VG Bildkunst, Bonn 2013.

Plate 12.1.

Tadeusz Kantor, *Praczka*, 1946, oil on canvas, 128×84 cm.
© Krzysztof Wilczynski/ Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie.

Plate 13.1.

M.H. Maxy, *Brigadieri pe Valea Jiului*, 1947, oil on canvas, 79×63 cm.
The National Museum of Art, Bucharest.

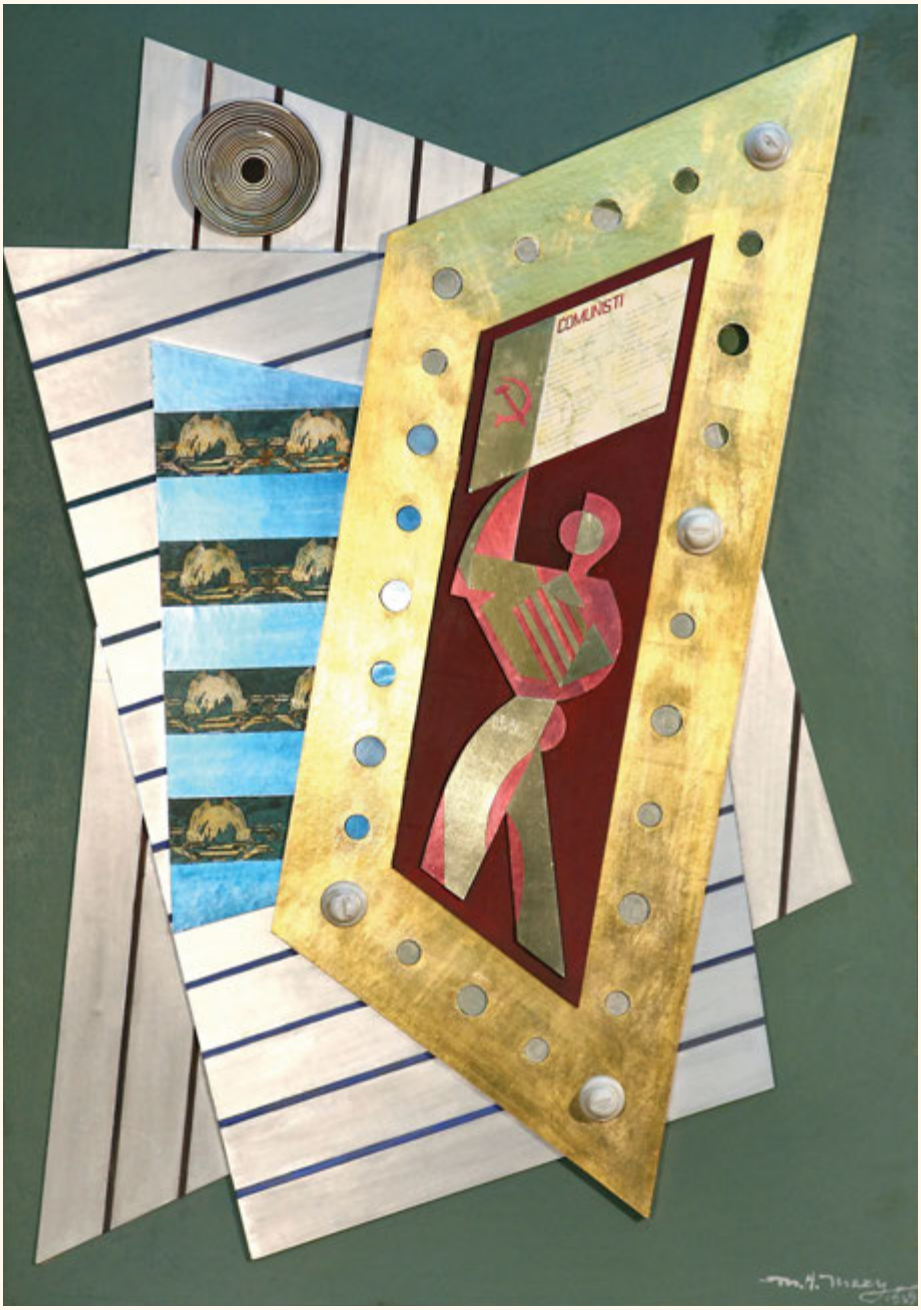

Plate 13.2.

M.H. Maxy, *Comuniștii—Construcție*, 1969, oil, print, metal, and stoneware assemblage on wood, 195×145 cm. The National Museum of Art, Bucharest.

Plate 14.1.

Willi Neubert, *Neuererdiskussion*, 1969, oil on canvas, 190×230 cm.
© Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. © VG Bildkunst, Bonn 2013.

Plate 14.2.

Renato Guttuso, *La Discussione*, 1959, oil on canvas and collage, 220×248 cm.
© Tate, London 2013. © VG Bildkunst, Bonn 2013.

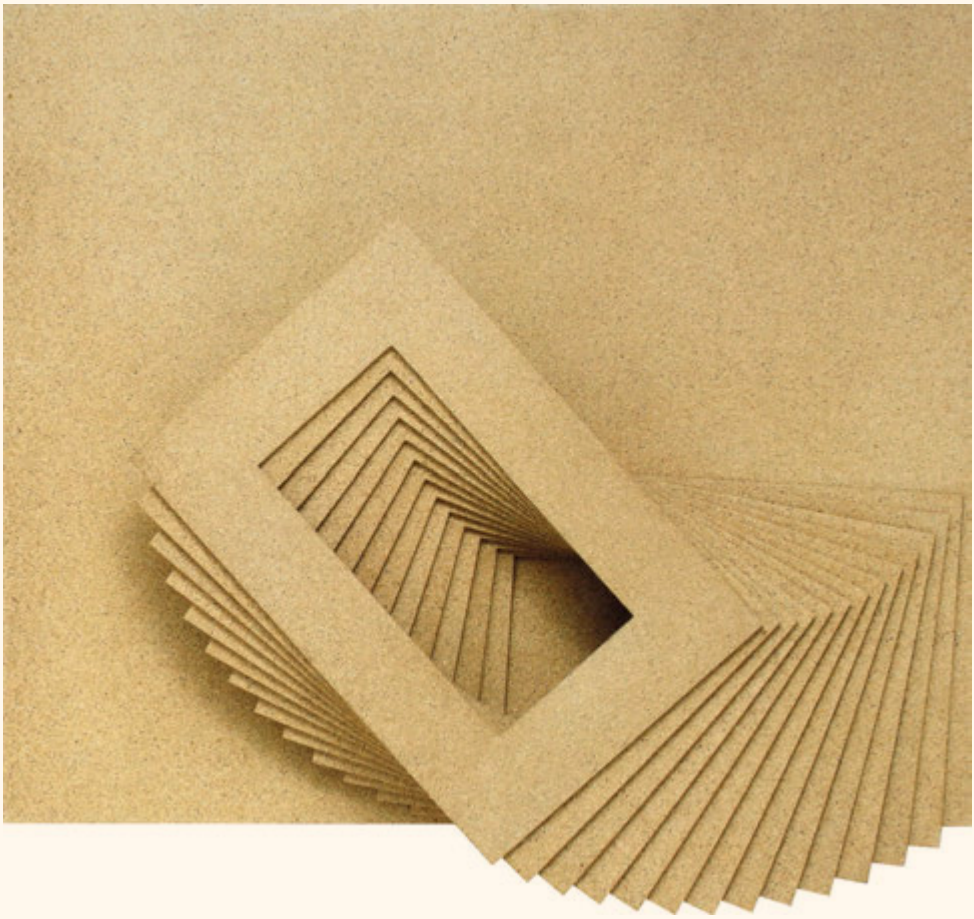

Plate 16.1.

Karl-Heinz Adler, *Schichtung oon Rechtecken mit Ausschnitt*, 1962, Presspan naturfarben, 70×83 cm, private collection

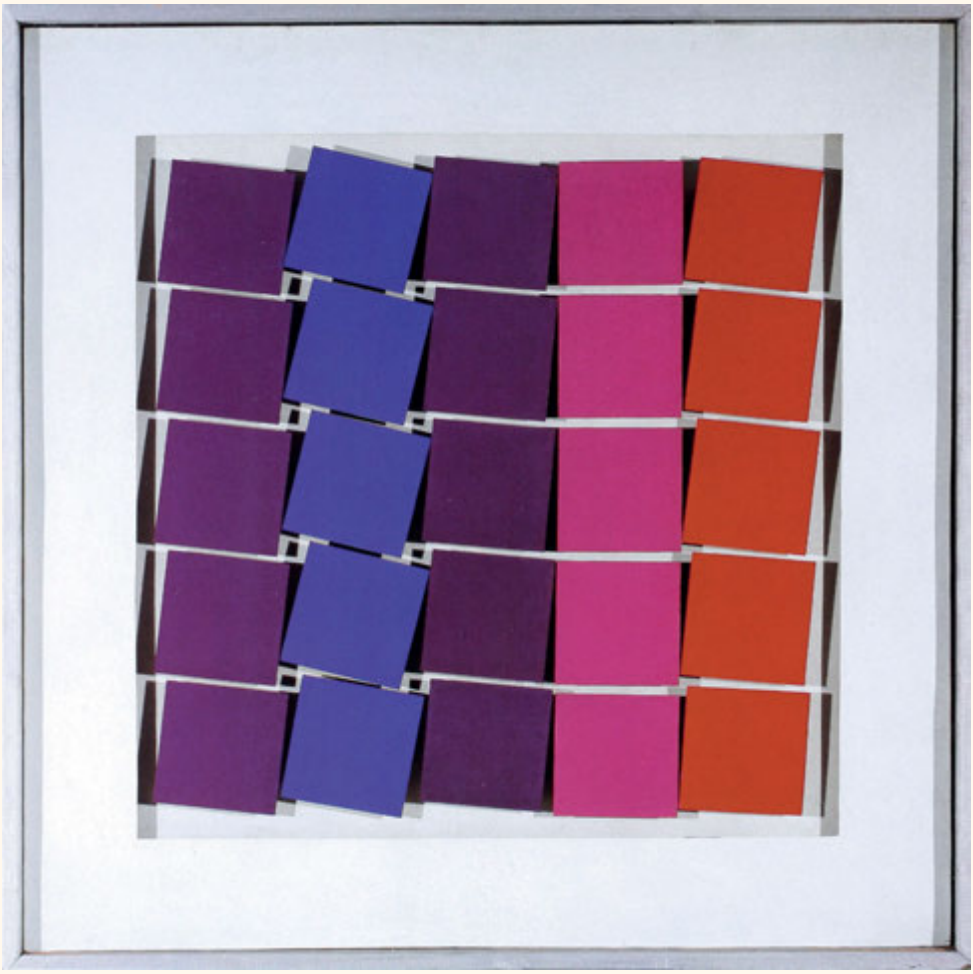

Plate 16.2.

Henryk Stażewski, *Relief 17*, 1967, acryl, metal, wood, 75×75 cm.
Muzeum Sztuki Łódz. Foto by Piotr Tomczyk, Łódz. © Marek Stażewski.

Plate 18.1.

Leonhard Lapin, *Monument Tallinale*, 1976, gouache on wood, 100×100 cm. Museum of Estonian Architecture. Photo by Peeter Sirge, courtesy of the artist.

Plate 18.2.

Sirje Runge, *Proposal for the design of areas in Central Tallinn*, display board 5, 1975, gouache on cardboard, 100×100 cm. Museum of Estonian Architecture.
Photo by Tiit Veermäe, courtesy of the artist.

Plate 20.1.

Birger Jesch, *no title* (contribution to the Schiessscheiben-Projekt), 1980, collage, 13×10,3 cm. Schwerin Museum, photo by Gabriele Bröcker.

Plate 24.1.
Todor Panayotov, *Landscape I*, 1966, etching. Courtesy of Elena Panayotova.

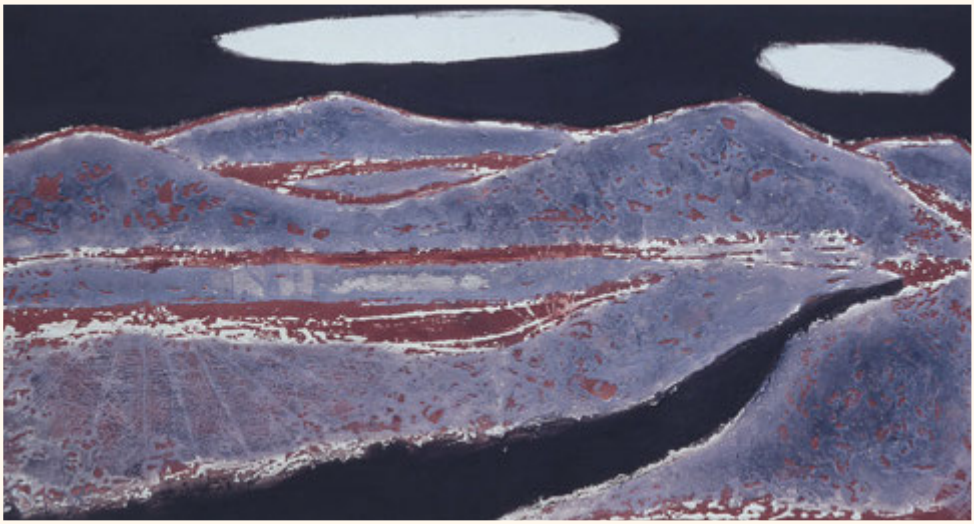

Plate 24.2.

Todor Panayotov, *Landscape II*, 1966, etching. Courtesy of Elena Panayotova.

Plate 31.1.

André Fougeron, *Civilisation atlantique*, 1953, oil on canvas, 380×559 cm.
© Tate London. © VG Bildkunst, Bonn 2013.

Plate 31.2.

Roger Somville, *Notre Temps, 1973–1976*, acrylic painting.
Hankar station Brussels. Courtesy of Roger Somville.

Plate 32.1.

Mireille Miailhe, *Pieds nus dans la neige, Algérie*, 1952, crayon on paper, 70×47 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

Plate 32.2.

Boris Taslitzky, *Femmes d'Oran*, 1952, oil on canvas, 114×147 cm.
Private collection. © Private collector. Photo by Isabelle Rollin Royer.

Plate 35.1.

Semen Chuikov, *A Daughter of Soviet Kyrgyzia*, 1948, oil painting, 120×95 cm.
© The State Tretyakov Gallery.

Art *beyond* Borders

With 36 contributions by scholars from 14 countries, the present volume gathers an unusually high number of texts as a result of a collaborative process over several years. Most of them are case studies of a single artist, an image, an exhibition, or an encounter. The project was conceived as a kaleidoscopic research undertaking with the purpose of accounting for the heterogeneity of the historical material and to reflect the diversity of the academic community writing on art history across present-day Europe.

The volume highlights the fluctuation of exchanges in the visual arts during the Cold War period, thanks to in depth contextualized analysis, paying particular attention to the discrepancy between the production and the reception of art. It offers a reflection on the historical sources available, the issue of languages, and the various geographical levels. It innovates a geographical narrative of shifting realities and expanding borders and abandons any kind of archetypal map.

Academic publications on both the capitalist and communist side have shown the relevance of distinct universalizing ideologies. As a consequence, a large part of the art involved in exchanges that actually occurred has become mutually invisible. The authors scrutinized all tendencies of the art scene, without isolating the avant-garde from socialist realists, but tracking their coexistence at the heart of communist movements.

Leipzig Studies on the Histroy and Culture of East-Central Europe
ISSN 2416-1160 Volume III

ISBN 978-963-386-083-0
90000 >

Central European University Press
Budapest – New York
Sales and information: ceupress@press.ceu.edu
Website: http://www.ceupress.com